Bengaluru Monday, April 6, 2026 Pages 14 Vol 79 No 95 ₹7

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DH

DECCAN HERALD

The Power of Good

Six-hitting frenzy in B'luru

RCB batters clobber 30 sixes for 250 as CSK chase falters

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Baramati bypoll: Congress pits Akash More against Sunetra Pawar

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'Economic power centres expected to become widely dispersed due to war'

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ED joins 'godman' Ashok Kharat probe **P.9**

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Wangchuk gets warm welcome in Kargil **P.8**

After Trump threat, Iran says whole region will burn

US Prez again talks of deal as airman rescued in daring operation

WASHINGTON/CAIRO/DUBAI, AGENCIES

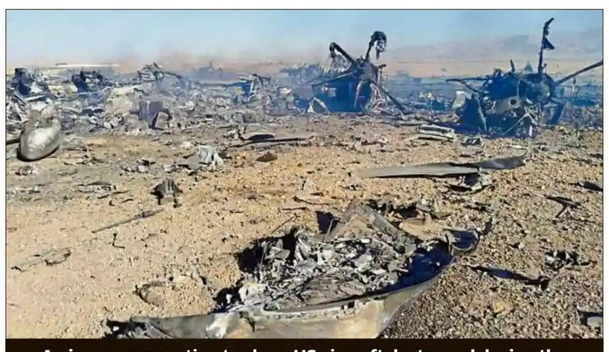
US President Donald Trump on Sunday ratcheted up pressure on Tehran, threatening in an expletive-laden social media post to target Iran's power plants and bridges on Tuesday if the strategic Strait of Hormuz is not reopened, after American forces rescued an aviator whose fighter jet fell behind enemy lines.

A defiant Iran showed no sign of backing down, striking energy and infrastructure targets in the Gulf Arab countries, including in Kuwait, the UAE and Bahrain, and challenging the US account of the rescue.

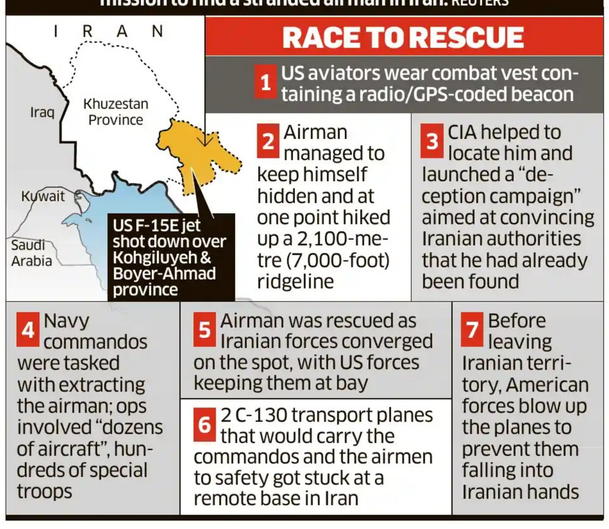
"Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!!" Trump said in the Truth Social post, laden with expletives.

Later on Sunday, the president in a follow-up post gave a more precise deadline: "Tuesday, 8 pm Eastern Time!"

In at least seven Sunday interviews, Trump continued his threats against Iran as he pushed for concessions. He told *Fox News* that Iran is negotiating and that a deal is possible on Monday, but if not, he will "take" the country's oil.



An image purporting to show US aircraft destroyed during the mission to find a stranded airman in Iran. REUTERS



RACE TO RESCUE

1. US aviators wear combat vest containing a radio/GPS-coded beacon
2. Airman managed to keep himself hidden and at one point hiked up a 2,100-metre (7,000-foot) ridgeline
3. CIA helped to locate him and launched a "deception campaign" aimed at convincing Iranian authorities that he had already been found
4. Navy commandos were tasked with extracting the airman; ops involved "dozens of aircraft", hundreds of special troops
5. Airman was rescued as Iranian forces converged on the spot, with US forces keeping them at bay
6. 2 C-130 transport planes that would carry the commandos and the airmen to safety got stuck at a remote base in Iran
7. Before leaving Iranian territory, American forces blow up the planes to prevent them falling into Iranian hands

In response, Tehran accused Trump of following orders from Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "Your reckless moves are dragging the US into a living HELL for every single family, and our whole region is going to burn because you insist on following Netanyahu's commands," Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, posted on social media.

Earlier, Trump announced the rescue of the downed F-15E jet's weapons system operator in a social media post.

Iran, however, said it had "foiled" the operation, and distributed images appearing to show the wreckage of several aircraft, but did not deny that US forces had extracted him.

▸ Iran, Page 4

Autos may thin out today

Thousands of auto-rickshaw drivers in Bengaluru continue to face a harrowing time due to auto LPG shortage. With stocks expected to remain low until the next load arrives on Tuesday, commuters can expect fewer autos on the road on Monday and fare demands above the meter.

Details on Page 3

Transport costs soaring in US

The war against Iran has started to impact Americans. The average price of petrol in the US has increased to $4.09 a gallon (3.79 litres) on Friday, up more than one dollar from just before the war.

Details on Page 12

Oman, Iran hold talks

Oman and Iran held talks on easing passage through the Strait of Hormuz, the Omani state media said on Sunday. "The experts from both sides put forward a number of visions and proposals regarding this," it said.

20 yrs, but no site: Bank staff's dreams dashed

Govt report exposes illegal deals and crores in dues

NAVEEN MENEZES
BENGALURU, DHNS

When employees of the erstwhile Vijaya Bank pooled their hard-earned savings for a housing project, they dreamt of owning a modest site on Bengaluru's outskirts and retiring in peace.

Twenty years later, most are already retired but the sites never came. And according to a damning government inquiry report, it may never come.

The origins of the issue date back to 2005-06 when the Vijaya Bank Employees Housing Co-operative Society—following the success of creating a residential layout in Bilekahalli on Bannerghatta Road—entered into an agreement with SPR Developers, a private firm, to form a new residential layout in Bidadi.

Over 1,700 members of the society had then paid a total sum of Rs 85.45 crore towards acquiring 126 acres of land spread across five villages. However, a substantial portion of the land — over 56 acres—was later found to have defective title and possession issues. Only about 70 acres of land had proper titles but was non-contiguous, which meant it was unfit to form a proper layout.

As negotiations with the developer failed, the society took the matter to the Karnataka High Court.

In April 2013, a consent arbitration award was passed, ordering the developer to pay Rs 185 crore, including interest. The society was asked to return the 126 acres to the developer. But the developer failed to comply with the terms and defaulted on payments.

TIMELINE OF LOST HOPE

- **2005-06** Society, private firm sign agreement to form residential layout
- **2006-2012:** Members pay Rs 85.45 cr for acquiring 126 acres
- It is found that land has document issues
- **2013:** Arbitration award orders developer to pay Rs 185 cr; developer fails to pay
- **2021:** Arrest warrants against directors of pvt firm
- **2021-2023:** New director board of society choses to take matter out of court
- **2023:** Assistant registrar of cooperative societies says the society's board "colluded" with developer

▸ Housing project, Page 4

Modi attacks TMC over Malda gherao

COOCH BEHAR, PTI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday made the Malda gherao of judicial officers the centrepiece of the BJP's campaign on lawlessness in West Bengal, alleging it reflected the TMC's "sponsored maha jungleraj" and framing the Assembly polls as a battle between the "bhay" (fear) spread by the ruling party and the BJP's "bharosa" (trust). Addressing his first rally in Bengal after the election schedule was announced, Modi used the Malda incident to sharpen the BJP's twin campaign planks of collapsing law and order and alleged demographic change, to attack the Mamata Banerjee government.

Details on Page 5

Cong claims Himanta's wife holds 3 passports, seeks probe

NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Congress on Sunday alleged that Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife possesses passports from three countries, as well as businesses and assets in the UAE and the United States, which were not reflected in his election affidavit.

It sought a probe into the matter and asked the government to ascertain whether Sarma's wife, Riniki Sarma Bhuyan, also holds an Indian passport and her nationality.

The party also urged the Election Commission to look into the omissions in the affidavit of Sarma, who is contesting from Jalukbari.

The party demanded Sarma's arrest and disqualification from the upcoming elections.

Himanta Biswa Sarma with his wife Riniki Sarma Bhuyan. PTI FILE

Congress Media and Publicity Department Chairman Pawan Khera told a press conference that they have received documents from "friends" who live abroad and that the documents were corroborated by the party.

He claimed Riniki Sarma Bhuyan has passports of the UAE, Egypt and Antigua and Barbuda, which are "not expired but live".

Hitting back at the Congress, Chief Minister Himanta Sarma said, "desperate and baseless" attacks only expose their "sinking" ground.

"These are malicious, fabricated, and politically motivated lies aimed at misleading the people of Assam," the chief minister added.

Warning that he and his wife will file criminal and civil defamation cases against Khera in the next 48 hours, the chief minister said, "Documents being circulated show multiple glaring inconsistencies, suggesting a crude and poorly executed attempt at digital manipulation."

▸ Himanta, Page 4

Missing Kerala trekker found after 4 days

BENGALURU, DHNS: A 36-year-old woman from Kozhikode in Kerala, who went missing four days ago at Tadiandamol Betta in Kodagu district, was rescued on Sunday. The state government had on Sunday deployed about 40 personnel along with a drone camera to search for G S Sharanya (36), who had travelled alone from Kerala and arrived at a homestay in Kakkabbe. She had gone missing on April 2.

Details on Page 3

Siddu slams Modi on delimitation

BENGALURU, DHNS: CM Siddaramaiah on Sunday slammed PM Narendra Modi's assurance that southern states wouldn't lose seats in the proposed delimitation exercise as "less like statesmanship and more like election-driven messaging." The issue has never been about whether the number of LS seats of southern states increases, but about how they increase, the CM said.

Details on Page 3

With inflation on mind, RBI may hold rates in April policy review

MUMBAI, PTI: The Reserve Bank is likely to keep the benchmark policy repo rate unchanged at 5.25% in the April monetary policy review meeting, as the West Asia crisis is likely to push up inflation, said economists.

The continuing geopolitical tensions in West Asia, volatility in commodity prices and sharp currency movement that have seen the rupee hit record lows have complicated the policy outlook, and its projections on growth, inflation and also the stance of policy will be keenly watched, the poll of over a dozen economists said.

"Given the uncertainty around crude oil, the RBI is likely to remain on pause in the April policy and closely monitor incoming inflation data before taking any further action," said Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ICRA.

Dipti Deshpande, principal economist, Crisil, said under the base case expectation that inflation stays close to the MPC's target, the monetary policy may look through this supply shock and will keep rates on hold.

▸ RBI, Page 4
Moody's cuts India's GDP estimates, Page 11

EASTER CELEBRATION

People light candles as they take part in a mass prayer on Easter, at The Queen of the Apostles' Church, in Patna, Bihar. PTI

Quickly

Govt jobs fewer; charity has no place in it: SC

Stating that public employment are scarce, the Supreme Court has said that grace, charity, or compassion ought to stay at a distance in matters of public employment if a level playing field was to be secured.

Details on Page 9

Govt steps up 5 kg LPG supply

The Centre on Sunday said that 5 kg LPG (FTL) cylinders are now available at LPG distributorships on showing valid ID proof. According to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, over 6.6 lakh such 5 kg cylinders have been sold since March 23.

Details on Page 8

Guj ATS nabs suspect linked to Pak gangster

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad arrested a suspect on Sunday who is said to have links with a Pakistan-based gangster. The ATS arrested Bikramjit Singh, an Amritsar resident working as a laborer in Gujarat's Banaskantha.

Details on Page 9

Astronauts prepare for lunar flyby

The Artemis astronauts were gearing up for their long-anticipated lunar flyby. If all proceeds smoothly, as Orion capsule whips around the moon, the astronauts could set a record by venturing farther from Earth than any human before.

Details on Page 12

800 terrorists killed in Afghan ops: Pakistan

Pakistan on Sunday said nearly 800 Afghan Taliban terrorists have been killed in the ongoing operation by the security forces in Afghanistan. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar shared the update, giving a summary of the losses suffered by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and Afghan Taliban.

Details on Page 12

GREENING INITIATIVE

Plantation drives: An expensive exercise with little to root for?

SNEHA RAMESH
BENGALURU, DHNS

Plantation drives in Bengaluru have become more expensive, with costs for planting and maintaining the saplings skyrocketing. The civic authorities spend about Rs 1,600 on each roadside sapling, but many do not survive.

The money spent by the erstwhile Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) now, along with the five city corporations, has gone up from Rs 1,300 per plant in 2023-24 to Rs 1,600 by 2025-26.

PLANTING HOPE

- **1.39 lakh saplings** (Rs 1,322 per sapling) in 2023-24
- **1.32 lakh saplings** (Rs 1,641 per sapling) in 2024-25
- **84,100 saplings** (approx Rs 1,600 per sapling) in 2025-26

In the last three years, the civic authorities have spent about Rs 60 crore on plantation drives. However, experts say the results are not visible on the ground.

While the per-sapling cost includes three-year maintenance, environmental activists tracking the afforestation drive say many do not survive because their maintenance is inadequate.

In a recent letter to the Urban Development Department, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar noted that both medians and plants have not been maintained adequately.

He directed the department to prepare an action plan to keep road medians free of garbage and ensure the plants are well looked after.

Dattatreya Devare of the Bangalore Environment Trust says the GBA may have grand plans to plant a large number of saplings, but it does not take care of them well and as a result many die.

"From my experience, I have often seen saplings die and they are not always replaced," he stated. Denying the charge, a senior GBA official said that they do ensure the survival of the saplings. "We do check the survival rate and release payments (to the contractor) only in phases. We also check if dead saplings are replaced. The saplings are geo-tagged and audited," the official added.

▸ Plantation, Page 4

Government of Bharat
Committed to
Nari Shakti Vandan
4.6+ crore Sukanya Samriddhi accounts are securing our future
Over 3 crore of us are now Lakhpati Didis
35+ crore of us have accessed Mudra loans
CBC 22201/13/0002/2627

RCB Vs CSK: Flags, jerseys & a city that lives for this rivalry

Fans flood MG Road and Cubbon Road

ASHWIN BM
BENGALURU, DHNS

Since Sunday afternoon, a sea of fans flowed toward M Chinnaswamy Stadium in downtown Bengaluru.

Clad in Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and Chennai Super Kings (CSK) jerseys and waving flags, supporters occupied every nook and corner of MG Road and Cubbon Road, chanting "RCB! RCB!" and "CSK! CSK!" long before the first ball was bowled.

Jersey vendors were swamped as eager fans tried on jerseys on the spot, rushing to don their colours before heading in to witness the age-old rivalry live.

Manjunath Gowda, an ecstatic fan who travelled from Ranebennur in Haveri district, stood clutching his hard-won ticket. "We reached Bengaluru at dawn just to be here," he said. "The distance does not matter when it is RCB versus Chennai. We have been waiting since 2 pm just to feel the vibe."

RCB fans in full cheer at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium during the clash with CSK on Sunday evening.
DH PHOTOS/RANJU P

Small stadium, massive demand

The M Chinnaswamy Stadium's 32,000-seat capacity feels like a drop in the ocean for a fanbase that spans millions.

Siddharth M, another fan, said: "Every year, it is the same struggle. We are ready to pay, we are ready to wait, but the stadium is just too small for the love Bengaluru has for this team."

While thousands managed to pour into the stands, the heartbreak of those left outside was visible on the streets.

One fan stood near the barricades holding a placard that captured the desperation of the city's cricket-crazy youth.

Meant for the authorities

The sign, addressed to the authorities, read: "Dear DCM, my sister and friends did not get match tickets today. Please construct a 1 lakh capacity stadium for RCB fans before your term ends... Please! #ESCN #RCB."

Rs 59-cr travelator to link metro stations at Silk Board Jn

BENGALURU, DHNS

Namma Metro has floated tenders for constructing a 2.5 metre-wide travelator and walkway connecting the Yellow and Blue lines at Central Silk Board Junction.

On Saturday, the BMRCL floated tenders for the project's civil and structural works, including architectural finishes, at an estimated cost of Rs 58.99 crore with a nine-month deadline.

April 28 is the last date to submit bids, which will be opened on May 5.

Silk Board Junction in southern Bengaluru will be an elevated interchange metro station. While the Yellow Line station opened in August 2025, the Blue Line station is under construction. The two stations are located about 250 metres apart, necessitating the travelator.

Given the nine-month completion timeline (starting May 2026) for the travelator, it is unlikely to be ready if the BMRCL opens the 19.75-km Silk Board Junction-KR Puram stretch of the Blue Line by December. That will mean passengers must bear the inconvenience of exiting either station and walking amid busy traffic to switch between the Yellow and Blue lines.

Speaking at the 'Smart Lift and Mobility World 2026' in February, BMRCL Director (Rolling Stock and Electricals) Sumit Bhatnagar had announced that the agency would build 500 elevators and 1,000 escalators under the Pink and Blue lines, expanding the metro network by 78 km.

"As the network grows, the need for elevators and travelators will rise, particularly at major interchange hubs where seamless passenger movement is as critical as train operations," he had noted.

An artist's impression of the travelator and walkway connecting the metro stations.

Purple-Green line crowding to ease; new trains set to get nod

Rly Board grants provisional sanction for new rolling stock

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Railway Board has issued provisional sanction for new trains for the Purple/Green lines, boosting hope that the busy metro corridors will finally get more trainsets during peak hours by May-June.

The Railway Board communicated the provisional sanction to the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) in a letter on April 1.

The sanction is subject to the following conditions: The maximum speed of the new trains will be 80 kmph in fully inflated mode and 25 kmph in the deflated mode of the secondary air spring.

The BMRCL will also need a separate sanction from the Commissioner of Metro Rail Safety (CMRS) by submitting the Independent Safety Assessment (ISA) report related to the train's integration, operation and compatibility with the Direct To Go (DTG) signalling and train control system for the Purple and Green lines, the Railway Board stated.

One of the new trains for the Green Line at the Peenya depot.
DH PHOTO

The BMRCL has received three DTG trains, including a prototype delivered in January 2025, for the Purple and Green lines. The trains must pass 37 statutory clearances before entering passenger service.

The BMRCL had approached the Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO), under the Ministry of Railways, to conduct statutory trials related to oscillation, braking, speed and system integration tests for the trains. The CMRS will issue the final sanction after receiving the ISA certificate.

A senior BMRCL official had told *DH* that the ISA certification process had begun, with a new signalling software currently being tested. The BMRCL expects to receive all approvals by May-June.

The new trains have been supplied by China's CRRC Nanjing Puzhen Co Ltd, which will deliver a total of 21 trains for the Purple and Green lines in partnership with the Bengal-based Titagarh Rail Systems Ltd (TRSL).

The existing 57 trains were supplied by BEML.

RAPID REVIVAL

Doddajala Lake restored in 60 days, securing water for 20,000 villagers

BENGALURU, DHNS

The 75-acre Doddajala Lake on Ballari Road has been restored in just 60 days through an intensive de-weeding initiative, ensuring year-round water availability and improved livelihoods for surrounding villages.

Fed by treated water from the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board's (BWSSB) Nagawara sewage treatment plant, the lake had been heavily choked by the invasive weed salvinia, threatening aquatic life and reducing its water-retention capacity, according to a press release.

The restoration project was executed by NGO India Cares Foundation, with technical support from Friends of Lakes.

It relied on local labour for the manual removal of weeds, which were later cleared using machinery.

The project was completed at a cost of Rs 24.4 lakh, with 70% of the funds contributed by members of the Rotary Club of Bangalore. Raineo Hospitality Pvt Ltd contributed Rs 4 lakh, while the gram panchayat provided Rs 2 lakh.

The lake after the restoration initiative.

The rejuvenated lake is expected to aid groundwater recharge, mitigate flooding, and support the drinking water needs of nearly 20,000 residents across eight villages, many of whom currently depend on deep borewells.

The project was inaugurated on Sunday by Rotary District 3192 Governor Dr Elizabeth Cherian and Rotary Club of Bangalore President Sukhen Padmanabha. It was symbolically handed over to the gram panchayat president, the media release added.

BDA plans elevated corridor, rotary flyover at Mehkri Circle

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) plans to build a four-lane elevated corridor from UAS staff quarters on Ballari Road to Mehkri Circle for Rs 403.25 crore.

The plan includes an elevated rotary flyover above the Mehkri Circle underpass to ensure signal-free crossing of the busy junction.

The authority has floated tenders for the project's construction. It is also planning to build a short-tunnel road under Hebbal Junction for Rs 1,086 crore to bypass the existing flyovers.

DH had reported that four companies, including Dilip Buildcon, Max Infra and CemIndia Projects, participated in the tenders.

The 2.18-km tunnel road, which will have exit and entry ramps at Esteem Mall and Baptist Hospital, differs from the longer tunnel road proposed along the same stretch that extends up to St John's Hospital in Madiwala.

Public transport enthusiasts are concerned that this development could delay the metro project, which is still pending approval from the Centre.

The alignment of the short tunnel, the longer tunnel and the elevated rotary flyover runs close to Namma Metro's proposed Red Line (Hebbal to Sarjapur, 36.59 km) at some point.

Public transport enthusiasts fear this may delay the metro project, which currently awaits the Centre's approval.

K-RIDE encashes L&T's bank guarantees over contract termination

BENGALURU, DHNS: K-RIDE on Sunday said it had invoked and encashed Rs 57 crore from two performance bank guarantees submitted by L&T Ltd after the company unilaterally terminated civil contracts for corridors 2 and 4 of the Bengaluru Suburban Railway Project (BSRP).

The move came after the arbitration tribunal rejected L&T's request for an injunction against the invocation of the bank guarantees.

Railway Infrastructure Development Company Karnataka (K-RIDE) said the tribunal's decision upheld its stand in undertaking civil works on two corridors after L&T defaulted and unilaterally terminated the agreements, not as per the terms and conditions of the contracts.

After contract termination, L&T had obtained a stay order from a commercial court against encashment of the bank guarantees.

It also invoked the arbitration clause in the agreement.

An arbitration tribunal consisting of retired Supreme Court and high court judges was constituted to look into L&T's claims and K-RIDE's counter-claims.

The commercial court later referred all matters to the tribunal, K-RIDE said.

L&T alleged that K-RDIE's failure to provide land, shift utilities and frequent changes in project scope led it to terminate the contract in July 2025.

K-RIDE has floated fresh tenders for Corridor 2 (Baiyappanahalli-Chikkabanavara, Mallige Line) and plans to re-tender Corridor 4 (Heelalige-Rajanukunte, Kanaka Line).

The BSRP's deadline has been revised to March 2030.

◆ CITY WEATHER ◆

FORECAST

Thunderstorm with rain

TEMPERATURES

Maximum	34.0°C
Minimum	23.0°C

Rainfall (as of 8:30 am)	NIL
Humidity (as of 5:30 pm)	51%
Sunset (Apr 6)	6:31 pm
Sunrise (Apr 7)	6:14 am
Moonrise	9:18 pm
Moonset	8:06 am

(Relevant data recorded at 5.30 pm) Source: IMD

Technology Development Board
Department of Science & Technology
Technology Bhawan, Block-2 New Mehrauli Road, New Delhi -110016

TENDER NOTICE

Tenders are invited in two bid system for conducting online examination (Computer Based Test) for WISE-IPR and Processing for Examination on behalf of TDB, New Delhi.

For detailed tender document with scope of work, Terms & Conditions and bids format etc, please visit TDB website **www.tdb.gov.in.** A pre bid conference is scheduled on **13th Apr, 2026 at 11:00 AM.**

The last date of receipt of sealed bid in TDB is **27th April, 2026 by 3 P.M.**

Under Secretary
TDB

CBC 36106/12/0001/2627

PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS

Need a hand? Write to us

Letters of grievances are pouring in and we are doing our best to accommodate as many as possible. Readers may write in to highlight civic problems affecting their locality and we will help address them in an interactive and effective manner.

Grievances and issues related to public utility agencies such as Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (Bescom) would be highlighted in the weekly column.

The writeups, which could be accompanied by photographs highlighting the problems, will be published on Mondays. Mail your grievances to: peoplesproblems @deccanherald.co.in

Repair broken benches in Lalbagh

A bench in the Lalbagh Botanical Garden is currently broken and unusable. We request the authorities to inspect and repair all such damaged benches to ensure a safe and comfortable experience for visitors.

A resident

This broken and unusable bench needs immediate repair.

Urgent request to fill potholes on Viveknagar Road

The stretch from ASC Viveknagar Main Road to the Infant Jesus Church signal has been in a severely damaged condition for several months, with numerous potholes remaining unattended.

This has created a hazardous situation for motorists and other road users.

Many vehicles have suffered damage, and commuters are experiencing significant discomfort, including severe back problems, due to the poor condition of the road.

The presence of loose sand along the sides, combined with potholes, has caused multiple instances of vehicles skidding, leading to injuries and further vehicle damage.

The situation poses a serious safety risk and requires immediate attention. We urge the authorities to take prompt action to repair this road and ensure safe commuting conditions for the public.

Kumaresh Subramanian

Fill potholes on Viveknagar road.

BSNL modem switching off repeatedly

The WiFi modem connected to my landline (FTTH Fibre Basic Combo–FBB) in Kasturinagar has been switching off every night for the past six months. This persistent issue remains unexplained.

Local technicians and customer support have been unable to provide any resolution, and there has been no clear response from the BSNL HRBR Layout/Banaswadi office.

Immediate action is required to fix this problem.

BR Krishna
Kasturinagar

Ban street vendor sound systems

The Government of Karnataka plans to ban DJs and item songs in religious processions and other events. It should also seriously consider banning street vendors from using public address systems in residential areas to promote their products.

The constant blaring has become a daily nuisance, disrupting the peace and calm of neighborhoods. It particularly affects sleeping babies, the elderly and patients, making the noise not only unpleasant, but also harmful to health.

V S Ganeshan
AECS Layout 2nd Stage, Sanjaynagar

Truck driver dead; suicide suspected

BENGALURU, DHNS: A 26-year-old truck driver allegedly died by suicide after testing positive for drunk driving during a routine police inspection in southern Bengaluru.

Police stopped Shanmugam's Tamil Nadu-registered truck near the Outer Ring Road (ORR) around 11 pm on Saturday for a routine drunk-driving check.

The check showed Shanmugam was intoxicated beyond permissible limits. Police impounded his truck and issued him a notice.

Hours later, police learnt that Shanmugam had hanged hung himself in the impounded truck.

Police have notified his family. No complaint has been received from them.

Traffic curbs today for temple fest in Begur

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) has issued a traffic advisory in view of the Sri Nagalingeswara Temple Brahmarathotsava at Begur.

With nearly 50,000 devotees expected, several roads will be closed or diverted on Monday.

Road closures

Begur–Koppa Road: Closed between PK Kalyana Mantapa and Yelanahalli Cross.

Manipal County Road: Closed from Falcon Market to the temple.

DLF Road: Closed between DLF Junction and Begur Lake.

Alternative routes

From Bommanahalli/Hongasandra towards Begur–Koppa Road: Turn right at PK Kalyana Mantapa and proceed via Devarachikkanahalli Road, DEO Heights, Nyanappanahalli Road, DLF Junction, and Yelanahalli Main Road.

For Manipal County Road commuters: Use Vishwapriya Layout via Chikka Begur.

From Begur–Koppa Road: Proceed via Bommanahalli/Hongasandra.

At Yelanahalli Cross: Left towards Yelanahalli Main Road, continue via DLF Road, Nyanappanahalli, and Devarachikkanahalli.

From Hosur Main Road/ Manipal County/Begur/ Bannerghatta Road: Turn left at Falcon Market and take Lake Road via AECS C-Block and Mylasandra to reach Begur–Koppa Road or Bannerghatta Road.

From DLF area: Proceed via Bommanahalli/ Hongasandra. Alternatively, turn left at DLF Junction (10th A Main) and continue via Nyanappanahalli Road, DEO Heights, and Devarachikkanahalli Road.

◆ IN THE CITY ◆

RELIGIOUS

Hoovina Karaga Shaktyotsava: Muthyalamma Devi, Maheshwaramma Devi and Kateramma Devi Temples' Development Board; Doopanahalli, HAL 2nd Stage, Indiranagar; 11 am.

Muthyalamma Devi Rathotsava: Organised by Muthyalamma Devi Temple Trust; Shivajinagar; 7 pm.

88th Sree Ramanavami Sangeethotsava: Organised by Sree Ramaseva Mandali Ramanavami Celebrations Trust; Fort High School, Chamarajpet; 4.30 pm.

33rd Sree Ramanavami Sangeethotsava: Srivani Kala Kendra, Basaveshwaranagar; from 6.30 pm onwards.

KRV chief slams Guv over criticism of third language grading system

TA Narayana Gowda

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Karnataka Rakshana Vedike (KRV) has condemned Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, accusing him of "overstepping" his constitutional bounds by intervening in the state's education policy.

In a post shared on social media platform X, KRV state president TA Narayana Gowda criticised the Governor's recent letter to the state government, which reportedly questioned the decision to introduce a grading system for the third language in the SSLC examinations.

Gowda defended the state's right to periodically update its education system, stating that the shift to a grading system for the third language was made based on the recommendations of education experts, aimed at benefiting Karnataka's students.

He further accused the Governor of "acting as a mouthpiece for Hindi imperialist lobbies" and challenged Gehlot to show similar concern for the promotion of Kannada in North India. "If you're writing this letter as a common citizen, then first write to the chief ministers of North Indian states and demand that they include Kannada as a third language under the three-language formula," Gowda remarked.

Threat of protests

The KRV leader also warned of large-scale protests in Karnataka if attempts were made to "halt" the implementation of the new grading system. He called on the Governor to immediately withdraw the letter sent to the chief secretary.

Autos may thin out on roads today as LPG shortage worsens

Next load to reach Bengaluru tomorrow

ASHWIN B M
BENGALURU, DHNS

Thousands of autorickshaw drivers in Bengaluru continue to face a harrowing time due to severe shortage of auto LPG.

Of the 160-plus stations in Bengaluru, drivers claim only about 30 are currently functional, often operating on irregular schedules.

With stocks expected to remain low until the next load arrives on Tuesday, commuters can expect fewer autos on the road on Monday and potential fare demands above the meter as drivers struggle to cover their increased fuel costs.

On Sunday, drivers abandoned their daily fares to secure a few litres of gas in many parts of the city.

At a LPG station in Rajajinagar, the scene was one of desperation. After being closed for two days due to "No Stock," the bunk briefly reopened on morning, only to announce it would close by 3 pm.

"I have been waiting since 7 am. I lost my morning business of Rs 1,000 just to stand in this line," said a driver who travelled from JP Nagar after finding five other stations shut.

Drivers reported a disparity in fuel rates before the crisis. While the rate was Rs 55 to 60 per litre, it now hovers around Rs 105, Rs 120 and even Rs 130 per litre at different private bunks. With many stations rationing supply, allowing only 10-12 litres per vehicle is available.

The frustration on the ground is boiling over into anger against both state and central governments.

At the Magadi Road tollgate bunk, where queues stretched nearly two kilometers toward Veeresh Theatre, drivers accused officials of being preoccupied with the upcoming by-elections and IPL matches.

"If we charge Rs 10 extra to a passenger, the government penalises us. But when bunks charge Rs 130 for gas, where is the Enforcement Directorate? Where are the ministers?" said an agitated driver.

While Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy previously stated that the issue falls under the union government's jurisdiction regarding LPG imports, the drivers remain unconvinced. They pointed out that the state continues to collect road taxes and traffic fines while failing to ensure the availability of essential fuel.

Autorickshaws queue up at a LPG refilling station in Chikkamagaluru on Sunday. PTI PHOTO

Auto LPG supply in Karnataka up by 70% since February: IOCL

Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) said on Sunday it had strengthened auto LPG distribution across Karnataka to address surge in demand.

The PSU's average daily supply increased from 43.5 metric tonnes per day in February to 59.53 MT/day in March, and further to 68.53 MT/day, starting April 4. This translates to a nearly 70% increase since February.

In Karnataka, oil marketing companies (OMCs) operate 72 Auto LPG dispensing stations, with 55 run by IOCL alone. Private players operate over 300 ALDSs, of which nearly 80% have become non-operational, it said.

According to IOCL, infrastructure limitations, including limited ALDSs, have constrained dispensing capacity and operational challenges make it difficult to fully offset supply gap caused by closure of private auto LPG outlets. Pricing disparities are influencing consumer behaviour. While PSU-operated outlets are selling auto LPG at Rs 89.52 a litre in Bengaluru, private marketers are selling between Rs 99 and Rs 105. This difference has resulted in increased footfall and longer wait times at PSU-operated stations.

Noting that approximately 70% of auto fleet is equipped with dual-fuel capability, IOCL asked drivers to switch to petrol for now.

Domestic LPG supply stable, don't book refill before 25 days: Govt

BENGALURU, DHNS

Amid growing concerns over the fuel crisis in Karnataka, the Food and Civil Supplies Department has clarified that there is no shortage of domestic LPG cylinders.

A senior official attributed the current market pressure to panic booking and hoarding by consumers.

The official stated that while the commercial LPG sector is experiencing genuine supply constraints, the domestic segment remains well-stocked.

He noted a surge in refill requests, suggesting that panic-stricken residents are bypassing standard protocols.

"A single domestic cylinder typically lasts a household at least 25 days. Under normal circumstances, a consumer can only book their next refill after this period," the official explained.

However, there's a new trend where households are using three to four different mobile numbers to book multiple cylinders simultaneously. "People are panicking and hoarding unnecessarily, which creates a lag in the distribution chain for others," he added.

The department has urged citizens not to engage in panic buying. Officials maintained that as long as consumers stick to the 25-day refill cycle through official PSU channels like HPCL or Indian Oil, there will be no disruption in supply. Measures are being taken to track and curb the use of multiple IDs for booking to ensure equitable distribution.

G S Sharanya (centre) with the rescuers.

Missing Kerala trekker found after 4 days, tells tale of survival

Separated from group while climbing down Tadiandamol hill

BENGALURU, DHNS

Hours after the state government launched an intense search operation, a team of indigenous persons rescued a woman tourist who had gone missing for four days in the thick forests of Tadiandamol in Kodagu district.

The government on Sunday deployed about 40 personnel along with a drone camera to search for G S Sharanya (36), who had travelled alone from Kerala's Kozhikode and arrived at a homestay in Kakkabbe, a village about 10 km from Napoklu.

The woman, who went missing after leaving for Tadiandamol on Thursday (April 2), was found on Sunday afternoon by a rescue team comprising members of the Kudiya community. Videos on social media showed a smiling Sharanya walking with her rescuers.

She had climbed up along with 15 other trekkers, but lost her way while coming down.

Speaking to media persons, Sharanya thanked the rescuers as she described her harrowing experience, with things taking a turn for the worse after she lost her way.

"I was continuing to climb down and went quite far away. Suddenly, my mobile network was gone. The forest had become dense. I tried to contact an office friend. I typed a message saying 'I lost my path'. I tried to call the forest department's helpline. My mobile had no battery and got switched off," she said.

To a question, the woman said she had not carried food as she had thought it was a 'short trek'.

While initial reports said the woman was rescued from an abandoned bungalow, Sharanya said she stayed on a rocky outcrop near a stream. The nights were cold and the situation got worse after a heavy rain.

"On the first day, I didn't walk because my legs were hurting. On the second day, I decided to stay on the rocky outcrop as I hoped that the visibility of the area will help a drone to track me. On the third day, I started walking up, but the heavy rain foiled the plan. It was all wet and freezing cold," she said.

On Sunday afternoon, she started walking upward. The woman survived on water collected from the stream.

"Occasionally, I would scream for help. Finally, I heard someone responding. They (the rescuers) reached me in a short time," the woman said, but added that she was not afraid: "I didn't feel afraid. I don't know why".

Tadiandamol is the highest peak in Kodagu district and is a sought-after trekking point.

Due to its proximity to Kerala, it attracts a huge number of trekkers from the neighbouring state.

The rescuers said it was an area frequented by elephants and people do not venture into these forests.

Trekkers must be careful: Minister

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre said measures to deploy additional personnel and a drone with thermal camera were taken following directions from Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Personnel from police, anti-Naxal force, dog squad as well as staffers from the forest department were pressed into action.

"We searched in the night too. Nine teams had combed the area today. She is in good health and I have directed officials to ensure she reaches home safely. I advise people to take precautions while going on treks," he added.

Design engg is much more than product aesthetics, says expert

Day 2 of Eduverse sees focus on viable career paths

BENGALURU, DHNS

The second day of Eduverse, the premier education and career guidance expo organised by *DH* and Prajavani, spotlighted the novel B Tech programme in design engineering and highlighted human resources as a viable career path.

Speaking at the event, Commodore (Dr) Pramod R Kulkarni, pro vice-chancellor of the School of Design Engineering at Reva University, explained the importance of design courses.

"We currently have bachelor's courses in design engineering in the country, but they all focus only on one aspect of design: the aesthetics of the product. That is not why anybody purchases a product. This is the systematic gap we are trying to address," he said.

Dr Kulkarni emphasised that initiatives such as Make in India would succeed when the country is also able to design.

Staff from an educational institution address students' queries on the second day of Eduverse in Bengaluru on Sunday. DH PHOTOS/M S MANJUNATH

'Don't make choices on peer pressure, pay only'

Moving away from the common courses such as engineering and medicine, the forum offered students a fresh perspective to consider human resources as an option.

Naganagouda S Jakkanagoudar, general secretary of National Human Resources Development (NHRD), Bengaluru, said: "HR is a powerful career as it offers opportunities to influence leadership, shape company culture, provides exposure to corporate culture and is one of the careers with high global demand."

Human resources, he continued, provides an opportunity to become leaders early and build a professional network across industries.

"HR is needed in every part of the industry. Whether it is science, commerce or arts, the one constant is HR. Every company needs an HR person, whether to open, run or close the company. Students should use such an opportunity wisely," he said.

He urged the students to understand their interests and then explore career opportunities in the field, which has significant growth potential. He advised them against making decisions based on peer pressure or choosing careers only for the pay.

Naganagouda S Jakkanagoudar, general secretary of National Human Resources Development, speaks on the importance of a career in human resources.

"If we do not design products, we will be forced to bring other countries' designs and manufacture them here, calling it 'Make in India'," he noted.

According to him, the BTech programme at Reva University has a unique structure compared to existing courses.

It's a design-centric multidisciplinary engineering programme that re-imagines engineering through an activity-based, project-based, challenge-based and case-study-based curriculum, combining creative design and engineering rigour.

The course also focuses on teaching engineering subjects with an orientation towards design.

Commodore (Dr) Pramod R Kulkarni, pro vice-chancellor of the School of Design Engineering at Reva University, speaks about design thinking and technology-driven innovation.

WHERE OPTIONS OVERFLOWED

Beyond the beaten path & letting kids follow their minds

BENGALURU, DHNS

Hundreds of students and parents attended the second day of Eduverse, the premier education and career guidance expo organised by *DH* and Prajavani on Sunday, hoping to navigate their next steps to the future.

Participants had come from many parts of the state, including Tumakuru, Mysuru and Hassan.

Sneha M, a parent, said: "We were enlightened about paramedical and physiotherapy courses. We are convinced that these can be good options for our daughter".

Expressing a sense of relief, Harini Rupesh, a parent from Tumakuru, said: "We want to send our son to Bengaluru next year after he completes his II PU. We cannot go to all colleges in the city. This expo helped us a lot by bringing everything under one roof."

After interacting with experts at the expo, many parents were convinced to let their children pursue their dreams.

Ramesh Kulkarni, whose daughter wishes to study psychology, said: "I wanted her to become an engineer or doctor, but she wanted to pursue humanities and take up psychology. I was not very keen on it. But after I spoke to a few professors from different institutions, I am considering letting her pursue psychology".

Vinay Harish, a student, said: "I learnt about the expo while reading *DH* and came here without any expectations, but I think the expo helped me understand what I should be looking for while choosing colleges".

Rajini A, a PU student in search of UG courses, said: "I chose science in PU to buy some time to decide what I want to do. I came to the expo looking for answers. I spoke to a couple of colleges and got a lot of inputs".

Students were also offered mock CET and NEET tests to prepare them.

Students get career guidance at a stall at the exhibition.

Siddu slams Modi, calls delimitation 'blatant assault on federalism'

BENGALURU, DHNS

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday slammed PM Modi's assurance that southern states wouldn't lose seats in proposed delimitation exercise as "less like statesmanship and more like election-driven messaging".

Taking to X, he argued that Modi's comments were "timed conveniently with political calculations" in TN and Kerala.

Siddaramaiah

"The issue has never been about whether the number of LS seats of southern states increases. The concern is about how they increase and how they benefit disproportionately. Under proposed expansion, while every state may see an increase, rate and scale of increase clearly favour BJP-dominated states".

He explained that the seats were expected to rise in Uttar Pradesh from 80 to 120 (+40), Maharashtra from 48 to 72 (+24), Bihar from 40 to 60 (+20), Madhya Pradesh from 29 to 43-44 (+14-15), Rajasthan from 25 to 37+38 (+12-13) and Gujarat from 26 to 39 (+13).

He noted that seats in Karnataka were expected to rise from 28 to 42 seats (+14), Tamil Nadu from 39 to 58-59 (+19-20), Andhra Pradesh from 25 to 37-38 (+12-13), Telangana from 17 to 25-26 (+8-9) and Kerala from 20 to 30 (+10).

"The southern states together gain barely 63-66 seats, while just these 7 BJP-dominated states gain about 128-141 seats - nearly double."

He said even when number of seats increases from 543 to 816, proportion of seats from South India remains at a "already modest" 24%.

"States that performed better in population control and governance are being penalized. Karnataka - a key driver of national growth - risks being sidelined".

Pointing out that UP (80) currently has 52 seats more than Karnataka (28), he said this gap would increase to 78. "Maharashtra's lead over Karnataka will expand from 20-30 seats".

Slamming the exercise as another "blatant assault on federalism," he said: "Having failed to win the trust of the southern people, the government is attempting to weaken our voice through manipulative restructuring".

Zameer, Mallikarjun present united front in Davangere

DAVANAGERE, DHNS

Days after their public fallout, ministers B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan and S S Mallikarjun presented a united front on Sunday with the former saying that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has instructed him to campaign for party's candidate in Davangere South.

At a press conference in Davangere, both Mallikarjun and Zameer said that they were working together to secure the party's victory. Zameer is entrusted the responsibility of Congress's campaign in 10 districts in Kerala, where he has been camping since March 26.

However, Siddaramaiah spoke to Congress leader K C Venugopal, and impressed on the latter the need for Zameer to campaign in the two constituencies.

"So, I have come here to campaign for Samarth. I will also campaign in Bagalkot for two days. If the need arises, I will come to Davangere again," said Zameer.

During his visit to Davanagere a few months ago, Muslims had appealed to Zameer to secure the Congress ticket for a Muslim candidate.

"I had told them I will discuss their request with the party high command. This led to some unpleasantness in the party. The high command, however, decided to field Samarth on the grounds that the ticket be given to a member of the bereaved family of Shamanur Shivashankarappa," added Zameer.

Mallikarjun, meanwhile, downplayed the spat with Zameer. "Zameer and I are close friends, both of whom refer to each other in the singular. It was one bad moment. There is no enmity between us," said Mallikarjun.

In Davangere South, Cong, BJP debutants promise to do voters' bidding

INTERVIEW

The Davangere South Assembly constituency is a blend of urban and rural, presenting any candidate a stiff challenge. Having returned from United Kingdom where he pursued a degree in business management, **Samarth Shamanur Mallikarjun** – grandson of late Congress veteran Shamanur Shivashankarappa and son of Minister S S Mallikarjun – has his task cut out for him. He will be up against BJP's **Srinivas T Dasakariappa**, whose father once worked as a hamali (labourer) at an APMC yard. Both are making electoral debut. They shared their plans in a freewheeling chat with **Nrupathunga S K** of *DH*.

Samarth Shamanur Mallikarjun

Samarth Mallikarjun.

Did you enter politics by choice or did your family take the call?
It was my choice. I wanted to serve the people to the best of my ability. Some leaders proposed my name.

What are the issues you are fighting the byelection on?
My age is an advantage – people can talk to me without hesitation. Developing a strong rapport with people is key. Healthcare and education are my priority areas.

Do you admit that you got the ticket as you come from an influential family?
I have an advantage, which I did not ask for.

Why should people vote for Congress again?
The Rs 100-crore budget grant announced for the constituency must reach every single voter. They (BJP leaders) are visiting specific wards and houses. But I am going to every house, since I wish to represent every voter. Primary health centres and maternity hospital need to be improved. Housing and industrial development are my other priorities.

What is your view on dynastic politics?
Neither do I encourage nor do I reject it. Dynastic privilege is present in other domains as well.

Compared to Davangere North, Davangere South is underdeveloped despite being a Congress bastion. How do you explain this?
There is a sociological reason to this, since the constituency is populated predominantly by people from labour class. But there is scope for development and we will undertake it.

Will it be a close contest between Congress and BJP?
I am confident of winning by a large margin.

Any comment about resentment among Muslim voters?
There is no resentment. Muslim voters will back me without fail.

Srinivas T Dasakariappa

Srinivas T Dasakariappa

This is your maiden electoral battle. What is the situation like?
The wind is blowing in BJP's favour; response to our campaign from voters has been overwhelming. Voters have promised to back BJP this time.

Are disgruntled leaders supporting the campaign?
Each worker is campaigning for the party. Other ticket aspirants from the party are campaigning extensively and all are working together.

What are your thoughts on being picked to contest the byelection to a general constituency despite hailing from a ST community?
The BJP has fielded a common worker as its candidate. This is the party's speciality. I am confident of getting the backing of all communities.

Why should voters support the BJP?
There has been no development in the constituency over the past 23 years. I want to change the destiny of this constituency, which is home to a large number of poverty-stricken voters. I am determined to improve their living and financial conditions.

What is your appeal to Muslim voters?
I am the BJP candidate for all 2.31 lakh voters of the constituency and not of any particular community or religion. I appeal to all to elect me as their MLA, and if I win, I will be their servant. People will not have to come in search of me, rather I will visit their houses and work for them.

Money, muscle won't get votes for Congress: BSY

BAGALKOT, DHNS: BJP veteran B S Yediyurappa said on Sunday that the ruling Congress are under the illusion that they would win the bypolls using money and muscle power, but they can't always buy votes.

"The Congress leaders have brought cash in suitcases to distribute it among voters. They are out to win the bypolls through dubious means. People are wise and they do not fall prey to inducements. They will teach them (Congress) a lesson at both Bagalkot and Davangere South," Yediyurappa told reporters on the sidelines of his campaign for party candidate from Bagalkot Assembly constituency Veeranna Charantimath.

"Fearing the defeat of the Congress, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has engaged in intense campaigning. He is camping in Bagalkot to ensure the candidate, who belongs to his community, crosses the line in the April 9 byelection," Yediyurappa said.

Replying to a query, he said, "The Muslim community is also aware of the Congress' "double standards", and will not fall for their allurements. I think they too will support us."

Woman alleges 'Love Jihad,' retracts in video

HUBBALLI, DHNS

Days after a Muslim gym trainer in Hubballi was accused of sexually assaulting a woman, an incident that Sriram Sene and other Hindu organisations alleged was an instance of 'Love Jihad', a 23-year-old woman from Hubballi on Sunday levelled similar allegations against a Dharwad-based youngster.

In the complaint filed at the Keshwapur police station, the woman alleged that Mufeez Miyanavar, whom she befriended in college, sexually assaulted her in November 2025. Furthermore, Mufeez allegedly threatened to kill her parents if she spoke of the incident to anyone else.

Keshwapur police promptly arrested Mufeez soon after the complaint was filed, and the latter was remanded in judicial custody, said Hubballi-Dharwad Deputy Commissioner of Police Shruthi M S, adding that they were investigating the complaint.

However, soon after she filed the complaint, a video wherein the woman purportedly admitted to filing the plaint under pressure from unspecified people, was shared on the Congress party's social media handle. In the same video, the woman is heard saying that Mufeez had been willing to marry her, and had even secured his parents' nod. She said that she was then visited by 'some people' who forced her to lodge a police complaint against Mufeez.

Congress leader Rajat Ullagaddimath alleged that BJP was trying to stoke tensions ahead of the byelection by projecting personal problems as instances of 'Love Jihad', which he said was part of the saffron party's 'toolkit'.

Plantation drives: An expensive exercise with little to root for?

Plantation, from Page 1

But the official conceded that plants are sometimes not checked after the three or five-year maintenance period ends.

"If they had planted and ensured all the saplings survived, Bengaluru would be much greener than it is today. We would be happy even if they spend Rs 10,000 on a sapling if they ensure it survives and improves the green cover. All of this seems to be an eyewash," said environmentalist Vijay Nishanth.

GBA Chief Commissioner M Maheshwar Rao said that they monitor the saplings and believe the corporations are doing a good job.

"Many of these saplings are planted on busy roads and are under stress. However, we do monitor and check them regularly," he told *DH*.

Over the years, the number of saplings planted has also come down significantly — from 1.39 lakh in 2023-24 to 1.31 lakh in 2024-25 to just 84,100 in 2025-26.

Sources in the GBA said that since the BBMP was split into five corporations, plantation drives took a backseat due to administrative reforms.

In 2026-27, the five corporations plan to plant about two lakh saplings, with a focus on bamboo plantation, Rao added.

How 1,700 Vijaya Bank employees lost...

Housing project, from Page 1

When execution proceedings were initiated in 2015, the court eventually issued arrest warrants against six directors of the private firm in March 2021.

Those warrants were never executed, rendering about 26 court hearings — which went on for several years — meaningless.

A new director board of the society — which had assumed charge in February 2020 — chose to take the matter out of court for settlement.

As per the terms, the society decided to retain control over 111 acres of land even though half of it was under title dispute. Among other decisions, the society also chose to transfer about 14 acres of land back to the developer.

However, in its inquiry report dated May 2023, the assistant registrar of cooperative societies observed that the society's board of directors "colluded" with the developer, causing it financial loss.

It found that the society had transferred 6 acres and 34 guntas of land — which is highly valuable — for just Rs 4.50 crore.

It also questioned the society's rationale behind holding settlement terms with the developer when the 15-year legal battle was in the fag end of a resolution.

The assistant registrar also termed the settlement deal "illegal".

Vishwanath Naik, president of the society, said the Bidadi project had run into problems only because the former directors acquired disputed land.

"I am trying to fix the issue. Even the terms of the settlement were finalised based on the decisions taken at three general body meetings. Had we continued the legal battle, we may have never recovered the dues nor the land," he said.

Naik, who was elected to the post twice in a row, said the project is finally moving in the right direction. "We have got about 60 acres of land which is right next to Mysuru Road. This piece of land has access to the road and the development will begin very shortly," he said.

Some members, however, alleged that the society went on to sell about 19 acres of land in 11 transactions even after the joint registrar of the cooperative societies rejected the board's request to sell its properties.

A representative of SPR Developers did not respond to *DH*'s phone calls and text messages seeking comment.

Meanwhile, the society — under pressure from members — has filed a fresh execution petition before the court, claiming recovery of Rs 185 crore, which has now escalated to Rs 644 crore, from the developer. For 1,703 families, the wait continues.

Trump ups threat to Iran after US rescues airman

Iran, from Page 1

Trump also said the US had sent guns to Iranian protesters earlier this year but he thinks the Kurds kept them.

Efforts brokered by Pakistan to bring the two sides to an agreement have so far been fruitless.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said Tehran demanded a permanent halt to the US and Israeli campaign.

"What we care about are the terms of a conclusive and lasting END to the illegal war that is imposed on us," he said in a message on X.

'No signs of compliance'

Iran has so far shown no signs of complying with Trump's demand to re-open Hormuz, despite the heavy damage to its military and civilian infrastructure.

On Sunday, Israel and a number of Gulf countries reported attempted drone and missile strikes by Iran.

Kuwaiti officials said Iranian drones significantly damaged two power and water desalination plants, and sparked a fire at the Kuwait Petroleum Corp.'s oil complex.

In response to Israeli attacks on petrochemical sites in Iran, Iran hit petrochemicals plants in Bahrain and Abu Dhabi, where damage was reported after falling debris from an air defence interception ignited three fires at a plant operated by the Borouge group.

The strikes followed similar attacks on oil facilities, a major aluminium plant and petrochemical sites in recent days and the Revolutionary Guards warned that more would follow if civilian targets in Iran were hit.

Earlier Iran also attacked an Israel-affiliated vessel with a drone in the Strait, setting the ship on fire, state media said, citing the commander of the Revolutionary Guards' navy.

Cong claims Himanta's wife holds 3 passports...

Himanta, from Page 1

Riniki said she expected Khera to exercise basic due diligence, rather than "circulate poorly fabricated images of imaginary passports and documents".

She said she will be let the law take over, as criminal charges are being initiated.

Khera has claimed that the UAE passport expiry date is March 2027 while that of the Egyptian passport is February 2028 and Antigua and Barbuda's is August 2031.

"We want to know from the chief minister, whose politics revolve around hatred for Muslims, whether his wife has passports from three countries, including two from Muslim countries. India does not allow dual citizenship. Does she have an Indian passport? Is she an Indian citizen?" he said.

"Are you a criminal that you need three passports?... They are preparing to leave India if they lose the elections...This is the level of corruption he seemed to have indulged," he alleged.

'Did Amit Shah set up SIT?'

Khera asked Home Minister Amit Shah whether he was aware of this and whether he had set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT).

Claiming that a company in Riniki's name owns two properties in Dubai, he said there are people who have assets abroad, but the question was why Sarma did not reflect it in his election affidavit, which is mandatory as per law.

In the state of Wyoming in the US, he alleged that there is a company operated by Sarma's wife which had a budget of $346.78 crore declared in May last year.

"We want to know why you have kept so much money in Wyoming...No leader would do this. Only those like Dawood Ibrahim, Neerav Modi, and Mehul Choksi will do," Khera asked.

RBI likely to hold rates in April policy review

RBI, from Page 1

"India is not unscathed from the current crisis and is feeling the mercury rising. Rupee is already hovering above 93 per dollar, and crude oil is adamant above $100 per barrel, resulting in a jump in imported inflation across states," Ghosh said, adding that the projected "super El Nino" will also put pressure on inflation.

Dipti Deshpande, principal economist, Crisil, said under the base case expectation that inflation stays close to the MPC's target, the monetary policy may look through this supply shock and will keep rates on hold.

The central bank has so far reduced the repo rate by 1.25% since last February, as the cool down in inflation offered it the space to work towards further boosting growth.

However, the central bank kept the rate unchanged in the August, October and February 2026 monetary policies.

The six-member monetary policy committee is scheduled to start its April policy review meeting on Monday, and the final vote on one of the most challenging policy reviews will happen on Wednesday.

Economists noted that while retail inflation has moved closer to the RBI's medium-term target of 4%, the recent surge in global crude oil prices has raised concerns about potential second-round effects on domestic prices, particularly fuel, transportation, and core inflation components.

As per estimates, every $10 increase in crude prices per barrel stokes inflation by up to 0.60%.

Crude prices, which were in the $60 per barrel vicinity for long, have hardened to over %100 since the start of the conflict in late February.

Additionally, the rupee has depreciated by over 4% since the war, which has consequences for pushing up import inflation.

Several economists indicated that the RBI may reassess its inflation and growth projections in the upcoming policy to reflect evolving global risks.

There is a possibility that the central bank could revise its inflation forecast upward for the current financial year if crude oil prices remain elevated for a prolonged period.

Given the prevailing situation, the focus of the policy will turn towards managing inflation rather than supporting growth, the economists said.

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06.04.2024

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General

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PERSONAL

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This election is a war between the Delhi Team and the Tamil Nadu Team. We must send Delhi Team back to where they came from with a decisive win
DH DECCAN HERALD
Political Theatre
I would like to tell Vijayan that BJP will be the 'A-team' in Kerala and you will be the 'B-team

Kerala: Money & Muscle Power

883 Candidates	863 Analysed

Candidates with serious criminal cases: 201 (167 in 2021)

BJP 60
CONG 39
CPM 21
IUML 13

Crime against women: 15
Murder: 4
Attempt to Murder: 13

Education

Between Class 5 and 12	414
Graduate or above	397
Diploma holders	44
Just literate	7
Illiterate	1

Age

25 to 40 years	41 to 60 years	61 to 80 years	Above 80 years
140	497	224	2

Source: Association for Democratic Reforms

Crorepatis
339 (249 in 2021)
CONG 61 | BJP 52 | CPM 52 | IUML 21

Rs 2,403 crore
Total assets of candidates

Rs 2.78 crore
Average assets (Rs 1.69 crore in 2021)

Richest
REJI CHERIYAN
Kuttanad, Kerala Congress
Rs 218.96 cr

Poorest
ASHNA THAMBI
Ettumanoor, SUCI(C)
Rs 84

Zero Assets Declared: 8 candidates

Poll vault

Green push

5,972 tonnes of waste – that is what the Chief Electoral Office (CEO) has estimated could be generated during elections in Kerala if there were 2,100 candidates. Of this, as much as 2,150 tonnes would come from banners and hoardings. Though Kerala has only 883 candidates this time, the CEO, in its booklet Green Assembly Elections 2026, has urged candidates, political parties and poll officials to avoid plastics, PVC and other disposable materials. Candidates have been asked to use only campaign materials made from government-approved products, 100% cotton, plastic-free paper or recyclable polyethylene.

SHEMIN JOY, NEW DELHI

Fan frenzy

Fans trailing behind actor Vijay's vehicle have become a common sight in Tamil Nadu. Recently, when he conducted a roadshow on his way to file his nomination from the Tiruchirapalli (East) constituency, a couple fell off their two-wheeler. Vijay immediately asked his driver to stop and stepped onto the road to check on them. He spoke to the couple briefly before getting back into the vehicle. It was a thoughtful gesture by the actor, but fans should refrain from following his convoy on two-wheelers.

ET B SIVAPRIYAN, CHENNAI

Silent strategist

V Sabareesan, son-in-law of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, is one of the key strategists of the DMK. He has long maintained a low profile in the public domain, preferring to work from the sidelines. This election, however, he has been more visible, attending party meetings. After taking part in a strategy meeting in Villivakkam on April 2, where his close aide Karthik Mohan is contesting against friend-turned-political rival Aadhav Arjuna of TVK, Sabareesan surprised many by speaking to the media. The question on everyone's mind: is Sabareesan soft-launching himself?

ET B SIVAPRIYAN, CHENNAI

Trivia

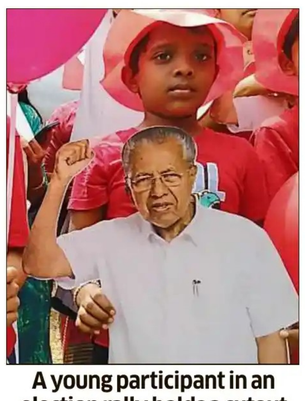
MP Veerendra Kumar, who won the Kerala Assembly elections in 1987 from Kalpetta in Wayanad as a leader of the then Janata Party, served as a minister for just one day. He was sworn in as Forest Minister on April 2, 1987, in the Left Front government led by EK Nayanar, but had to resign the very next day. While his supporters say pressure to revoke his first order against felling trees led to his resignation, critics attribute it to infighting within the party. Kumar was the Kerala state president of the Loktantrik Janata Dal at the time of his death in 2020. He also served as a Minister of State at the Centre and was a member of both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

Pinarayi tells a different story about Vijayan

Locals say CM is not the arrogant individual he is made out to be

FROM THE GROUND

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
DHARMADAM (KANNUR), DHNS


A young participant in an election rally holds a cutout of Pinarayi Vijayan. DH PHOTO

Lekshmi, an elderly woman from Pinarayi in Kannur, turned emotional while speaking about the local MLA, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

"It is with his help that the takeover of my home due to debt was avoided. He saved my family from losing our home," said Lekshmi, sitting in a bus shed in Pinarayi on Saturday.

Her friend Komalavalli added, "Not just Lekshmi, but many of us got our grievances addressed by him. He is not at all the stubborn, unapproachable person you people often say he is. He never shows any discrimination and extends help in all possible manners."

Salina, who runs a shop at Pinarayi, concurred. "Comrade may look quite tough, but we never had any such experience with him. Whenever he comes to his home here, he spends time at the MLA office and meets people. Even I approached him with a grievance about my sister, and it was resolved," she said.

Prakashan, who was at Salina's shop to buy groceries, echoed that Vijayan was not the stubborn or arrogant person as he was widely made out to be.

After campaigning for the CPM across the state, Vijayan on Saturday resumed canvassing in his own constituency, Dharmadam.

Situated around 20 km south of Kannur town, the Dharmadam village offers scenic views of backwaters and mangroves. Kerala's lone drive-in beach, Muzhappilangad, is also located in Dharmadam.

KERALA
Assembly Poll

Development projects

Over the last 10 years, the constituency witnessed considerable developments, like an education hub set up for Rs 285 crore, bridges, and improved roads and amenities for tourists.

Even though his campaign meetings are scheduled from 10 am, Vijayan reaches his MLA office — at the Pinarayi convention centre, close to his home — well in advance.

After a brief discussion with his party's local leaders, he starts the campaign. The 80-year-old's teenage grandson Ishan can also be seen accompanying him on the campaign trail.

In his address at campaign meetings, Vijayan's focus is usually on attacking the Congress-led United Democratic Front, which is the main Opposition party in Kerala. He also highlights his government's welfare and development initiatives.

People, cutting across gender and age, can be seen trying to get a selfie with him or stretching their arms for a handshake from the CPM's most influential leader in the country now.

Vijayan's victory margin at Dharmadam increased from 36,905 in 2016 to 50,123 in 2021. He is now taking on the Congress' V P Abdul Rasheed and the BJP's K Ranjith.

'Party is not sidelining me, but giving new opportunities'

Former Kerala health minister **KK Shailaja**, who represented Mattannur in the outgoing Assembly, is contesting this time from Peravoor in Kannur district. Her shift has triggered speculation, including claims that she is being sidelined within the CPM. Speaking to *DH*'s **Korah Abraham**, she responded to rumours about her position within the party and outlined the development issues she plans to highlight in Peravoor. Excerpts:

You represented Mattannur in the previous Assembly. Why has the party shifted you to Peravoor this time?

The CPM has a policy that when a candidate contests continuously from a constituency, especially if it is a party stronghold, that candidate will not contest again from the same seat, and a newcomer should be accommodated there. The candidate fielded in Mattannur now is VK Sanjoj. He is the state secretary of the DYFI and he is also from that constituency. So the party has given an opportunity to a younger leader there.

There has been speculation that this shift indicates you are being politically sidelined within the party.

That is false propaganda. The party has never sidelined me. When I first contested in 1996, the CPM fielded me in Koothuparamba, a party stronghold. Later, I was given opportunities to contest from winnable constituencies like Koothuparamba and Mattannur. At the same time, the party has asked me to contest from constituencies that were not with the LDF at that time, such as Peravoor and Peringalam (which is now part of Koothuparamba). So the party is actually giving me new opportunities.

What are the main issues you are raising in Peravoor during this campaign?

One of the key issues is development. In this constituency, there hasn't been any major push for development over the last 15 years. The projects that are currently visible here are mainly those initiated by the state government, such as the hill highway and road development projects. But there has not been a strong push at the constituency level to bring in new development initiatives. At the same time, there are plenty of opportunities here. For example, tourism has a lot of potential, but no significant projects have been proposed to develop that sector.

There has been discussion about the representation of women candidates in this election. Do you think enough progress has been made?

There has been a slight increase in the number of women candidates, but it is still not enough. We have tried to field good women candidates, including in winnable constituencies. Even then, it is clear that the level of representation is not yet adequate. We still have a long way to go in ensuring greater participation of women in electoral politics.

A contest of fear and trust: Modi

Says Trinamool responsible for lawlessness, BJP for development

KOLKATA, DHNS

PM Narendra Modi in Cooch Behar on Sunday. PTI

The election in West Bengal is a contest between *bhoy* (fear) of the Trinamool Congress and *bharosa* (trust) of the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in Cooch Behar on Sunday.

The *bhoy* that the Prime Minister referred to was due to the "maha jungle raj" that TMC is propagating in the state, and the Malda incident, where seven judicial officers were kept hostage by an irate mob, was an example of that, Modi said.

"You have *bhoy* (fear) of the TMC, on one side, and on the other, the BJP's *bharosa* (trust). On one side is the fear of TMC's cut money and corruption, and on the other side is BJP that accelerates development," he said.

Modi's narrative did not miss the illegal migration chapter, and he accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's party and the government of facilitating migrants from across the India-Bangladesh border, thus changing the demographic profile of the state.

To further strengthen his point, he said TMC titled its manifesto as "istehar", which is not a Bengali word.

"TMC recently released its manifesto for the coming elections. Instead of a Bengali word, it titled it as 'istehar'. Just think how they (the TMC) are trying to change the identity of Bengal," said Modi, before referring to the "Lal Ishtihar" (Red Pamphlet), which the Nawab of Dhaka, Khwaja Salimullah, had got written by Ibrahim Khan, at the behest of the British Raj around the time of Partition of Bengal in 1905. The document apparently set the stage for the 1907 communal riots.

WEST BENGAL
Assembly Poll

Istehar, or 'ishtihaar' as pronounced in Bengali, has its root in Arabic, and it means a public notice or a declaration. The word is frequently used in Bengali.

Sunday's rally was the first by Modi in the state after the poll dates were announced. BJP's de facto chief ministerial candidate, Suvendu Adhikari, was absent as he was in Nandigram.

Land, cash or ST status: What will win tea garden voters' trust?

FROM THE GROUND

SUMIR KARMAKAR
JORHAT/TITABOR, DHNS

Dipa Kalandi at Cinnamara tea estate in Jorhat. DH PHOTO

Dipa Kalandi flaunted the land patta that she received from the BJP-led Assam government last month.

"I am happy that *mama* (CM Himanta Biswa Sarma) has given us the patta," said Dipa, who works in the Cinnamara garden, a tea estate run by Assam Tea Corporation Limited.

However, she has not received money under the Orunodoi scheme for women for nine months despite being a beneficiary.

With over 35 lakh population in at least nine districts in eastern and North Assam, tea garden voters have always been crucial.

On March 13, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the drive to distribute digital land patta to over 28,000 workers' families. Just before the polls, the state government provided Rs 5,000 cash incentives to tea garden workers and hiked their daily wage by Rs 30, making it Rs 280 in the Brahmaputra Valley gardens.

The BJP manifesto has promised to enhance the wage to Rs 500.

ASSAM
Assembly Poll

Hope for ST status

BJP's another major promise since 2014 — meeting the demand for ST status to the Adivasi communities in tea gardens — however, has remained unfulfilled. "*Mama* may give the ST status after the elections," said Dipa.

The cash benefits, land patta and the hope of getting ST status have made BJP confident about keeping their tea garden votes intact.

Sabita Bhuyan — a worker in Duflating tea estate, a private-company garden in Titabor, about 30km away — just got a form for land patta. "They promised to give the patta after the election," she said. Sabita has also received Rs 5,000.

Basudev Gosai, a worker at Kasojan tea estate in Titabor, traditionally a Congress stronghold, said BJP workers were luring the tea garden voters by distributing forms for land patta and Orunodoi benefits.

"Why is the BJP not talking about the ST issue? Only ST status can secure our identity as Adivasis," he said.

Congress-BJP tussle

On April 1, Modi visited the Manohari tea estate in Dibrugarh. Hours later, Priyanka Gandhi addressed a rally in a tea estate in the Nazira constituency. Rahul Gandhi and Gaurav Gogoi also addressed a rally in a Titabor tea estate on April 2.

More than 850 tea gardens are in Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tinsukia, Charaideo, Golaghat, Biswanath, Sonitpur, Nagaon and Lakhimpur. In 2016 and 2021, BJP won in most of the seats.

BJP insiders say the party was focusing more on the gardens given the possibility of Muslims voting for the Congress this time due to the eviction drive and the communal narratives.

Vikas Tripathi, an associate professor of Political Science at Gauhati University, believes that tea garden voters are unlikely to go back to the Congress as it failed to address the ST status issue in the past.

Like Zubeen Garg, Cong works to unite people, says Rahul

BISWANATH CHARIALI/GOLAGHAT/KAMALPUR, PTI: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said the philosophy of his party is that of celebrated musician Zubeen Garg, who worked throughout his life to unite Assam.

Addressing election rallies in Assam's Biswanath, Golaghat and Kamrup districts, he alleged that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is the "most corrupt CM" in India, and said action will be taken against him if the Congress forms a government.

Rahul Gandhi

"Zubeen Garg worked his entire life to unite people of Assam; he never misbehaved with anyone. The Congress philosophy is also like that, to spread love against hatred," Gandhi said. He alleged that the BJP government led by Sarma is spreading hatred against communities.

"Let him speak for some more days. After that, the Congress will form a government in Assam, and legal action will follow even if he asks for forgiveness," he said.

He alleged that Sarma, along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, has created a "land ATM" to snatch land parcels from the public in Assam to give these to a few big industrialists.

ELECTORAL EFFORT

BJP plans trains for migrants from Gujarat to Bengal

SATISH JHA
AHMEDABAD, DHNS

SAFFRON PUSH

- Surat Bengali Samaj and local BJP leaders have identified over 3,000 BJP-supporting voters
- Most of them are migrant workers employed in textile factories
- The plan is to send 4,000-5,000 voters from strategically located constituencies across West Bengal

The bitter contest between the Trinamool Congress and the BJP in West Bengal is having an impact far beyond the state. In the BJP stronghold Surat, the saffron party is sending a train of supporters to Kolkata to influence a regime change.

The Surat Bengali Samaj and local BJP leaders were said to have identified over 3,000 BJP supporters — mostly migrant workers employed in textile factories — in the city.

"The objective is to change the government in West Bengal. The state has worsened over the past decade under the present government. Only the BJP can bring about that change, and therefore we are doing our bit by sending BJP-supporting registered voters," said Basudev Adhikari, the head of Surat Bengali Samaj, an umbrella organisation of more than two dozen small Bengali cultural groups.

According to Adhikari, about 2-2.5 lakh Bengalis live in the city, and 20-25% of them are Muslims.

He said the group decided to select voters carefully by creating a database and reaching out to them.

After verification, 3,000 voters are said to have been selected as on Sunday.

"We are yet to make a decision on their departure dates. Everything is under process," said Adhikari.

It has been planned to send 4,000-5,000 voters from strategically located constituencies across West Bengal, which are going to the polls on April 23 and 29.

He added that about two dozen students from the community were given space in the local BJP office, from where such voters were identified and their forms were submitted for arranging the journey.

Adhikari explained that all expenses were being borne by the association.

The saffron party sources said that train tickets were being finalised to send these voters to their respective constituencies.

"This is one of the many measures we are undertaking to defeat the TMC. We think that every voter going from Surat will be able to spread our message to their family and beyond," said a BJP leader in Surat.

Not all agree

"I don't think it will have any impact on the election. It may generate some news, and that's all," said a senior member of the association, who is also a founder-member of Bengal Club Surat — one of the oldest Bengali cultural groups in the city.

"I also think that cultural associations should not get into such political activism."

Congress fields Akash More against Sunetra Pawar

MRITYUNJAY BOSE
MUMBAI, DHNS

The crucial by-election to Maharashtra's prestigious Baramati seat will not be unopposed, as was expected.

Sunetra Pawar

The Congress has fielded Akash More against Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar — a move that has widened the rift within the Maha Vikas Aghadi-I.N.D.I.A bloc, which is in the Opposition in Maharashtra, and earned the ire of the ruling Maha Yuti.

This is the first time in nearly three decades that the Congress will contest from Baramati. Since the formation of the Democratic Front in 1999 and the MVA in 2019, the undivided NCP has contested elections from Baramati — a Pawar-family stronghold for over six decades. Following its split in 2023, the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) contested the 2024 Lok Sabha and Assembly polls as part of the MVA.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge approved the name of More, said AICC general secretary K C Venugopal in a statement on Sunday evening.

The polling was necessitated because of the death of then-NCP president and six-time DyCM Ajit Pawar in January this year.

Sunetra Pawar and Akash More, an advocate by profession, will file their nominations on Monday, the last day for doing so.

The Congress has claimed the support of the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi and the Mahadev Jankar-headed Rashtriya Samaj Paksha.

DECCAN HERALD
ESTABLISHED 1948

Malda row signals electoral anxieties

The incident in West Bengal's Malda district where a group of people held judicial officers captive is condemnable, and further exposes tensions in the poll-bound state. A backdrop of uncertainty over the voting rights of thousands of people adds significance to the incident. The Supreme Court, while criticising the state authorities and ordering a probe by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), took note of the "complete failure of the administration" for hours, putting the lives of the seven officers in danger. The officers were surrounded by people protesting the deletion of their names from the electoral rolls. West Bengal is going through a contentious Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process ahead of a two-phase election scheduled on April 23 and 29.

The Court noted that the Chief Secretary, Dushyant Nariala, was unreachable during the crisis, and directed the officer and local officials to explain their inaction. From the day the election dates were announced, the Election Commission of India has been directing the state administration. Soon after the announcement, the Commission ordered an extensive bureaucratic shuffle, bringing in a set of new officials, including the Chief Secretary and the police chief. What happened at Malda is an administrative failure for which the ECI should also be held accountable. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the Chief Secretary did not inform her about the incident. An alert administration would have ensured intelligence inputs about the protesters' plans and taken steps to avert the situation. Mamata has alleged that the violence was part of a political agenda to impose President's rule in the state.

The incident underlines concerns over disenfranchisement and a faltering administration

Anxiety over the possible impact of SIR is palpable in West Bengal, especially in the northern parts of the state. Hearings have started in connection with names that were deleted from a list of about 60 lakh, stamped "under adjudication." The apex court has been informed that of the 60 lakh names, only 29 lakh were adjudicated by last week; the rest of the voters are unlikely to be adjudicated before April 6, the last day for filing nominations in the first phase of the election. West Bengal has seen a protracted SIR, made more complicated than in the other states, by introducing provisions such as the "logical discrepancy" category. Large sections of people have raised concerns over their possible exclusion and disenfranchisement. These grievances have added a layer of unease to the state's already charged political climate. That the ECI has not demonstrated intent to address these concerns has only heightened the distrust.

Justice beyond departmental probes

In a significant ruling, the Karnataka High Court has stripped away a long-misused shield that allowed government officials to evade legal scrutiny for acts of corruption under the cover of departmental exoneration. It has unequivocally held that a bureaucrat cannot escape criminal proceedings where a *prima facie* case points to loss to the public exchequer. The case concerns allegations against IAS officer Rohini Sindhuri during her tenure as Deputy Commissioner of Mysuru in 2021. She is accused of procuring 14.71 lakh eco-friendly cloth bags at an inflated price of Rs 52 a piece, far above prevailing market rates of around Rs 13, causing an estimated loss of Rs 5.88 crore. The charges are aggravated by claims that funds earmarked for welfare schemes were diverted, bypassing the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement Act. Yet, the state government twice refused sanction for investigation, citing her exoneration in a departmental inquiry.

By setting aside this refusal, Justice M Nagaprasanna has reaffirmed a fundamental legal principle: departmental and criminal proceedings operate in distinct spheres. This aligns with the Supreme Court's ruling in *AAI v. Pradip Kumar Banerjee*, which underscored that internal inquiries – based on the standard of "preponderance of probabilities" – cannot foreclose criminal investigation, where proof beyond a reasonable doubt is required. At the heart of the issue lies the requirement of prior sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act. Intended as a safeguard to protect honest officials from vexatious litigation, it has become a double-edged sword. In practice, sanction is often granted or withheld selectively, insulating officials and, at times, their political bosses. The conflict of interest is inherent: the authority empowered to permit investigation may itself be implicated in the decision under scrutiny.

HC ruling reaffirms that departmental exoneration cannot stop criminal proceedings in corruption cases

The Supreme Court has repeatedly cautioned against such misuse. In a recent split verdict on Section 17A, Justice K V Viswanathan upheld the provision but read it down, clarifying that the government cannot have the final word. He ruled that any request for a probe must be filtered through an independent body like the Lokayukta or Lokpal, whose recommendation should be binding. When the government acts as the judge in its own cause, the sanction regime moves away from being a safety valve for the honest and becomes a sanctuary for the corrupt. The power to grant or deny sanction must be vested in an independent authority, and not with political or bureaucratic hierarchies with a vested interest in the outcome. Only then will the ends of justice be served.

POWER OVER PURPOSE

Washington's Tehran gamble

The Iran war is not about poor tactics but a classic case of meticulous military planning being sidelined for political goals

S K SAINI

In his address to the nation on April 1, President Trump announced that US-Israeli military operations in Iran were nearing completion, claiming to have decimated Iran's navy, air force, and neutralised nuclear/missile threats.

He also projected a withdrawal of US forces within two to three weeks and described the war as a successful investment, with the "core strategic objectives" in Iran having almost been accomplished after a month of conflict. However, he stopped short of articulating the underlying strategic objectives.

Taken at face value, his remarks suggest that the current scale and trajectory of military operations will likely remain unchanged.

Two days later, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth asked the Chief of Army Staff, General Randy George, and two other senior generals to step down without giving any reason for this unusual step in the midst of war. This ill-advised step reveals a worrying lack of coherence at the top in the conduct of operations against Iran.

The current US air campaign against Iran does not reflect military incompetence or poor tactical execution. Rather, it is a classic case of political goals outstripping operational feasibility, where meticulous military planning is sidelined by the political leadership demanding immediate breakthroughs and outcomes.

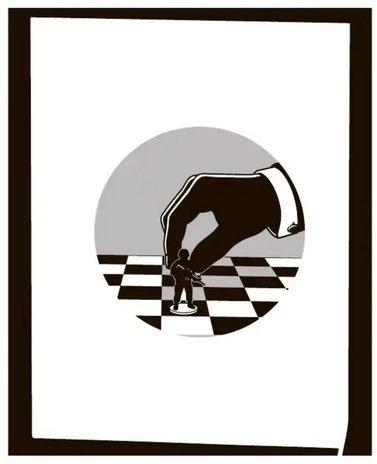
In fact, the US is waging a high-stakes war using a force level designed for rapid response, limited objectives rather than decisive victory. History offers a useful benchmark in this regard.

In the 1991 Gulf War, against a much weaker Iraq, General Norman Schwarzkopf, C-in-C CENTCOM, assembled over half a million coalition troops, backed by 2,000-plus aircraft and overwhelming naval power.

To support this massive array of forces the logistical build up took over six months. He did not confuse air superiority with decisive victory. The first phase was a long air campaign to incapacitate Iraqi military infrastructure as well as its air power. Then came the lightning 100-hour ground offensive to liberate Kuwait. In the Gulf War II in 2003, though the force levels were leaner, corps level manoeuvre capability, sizeable air and naval components were employed to achieve the war aims.

That looks very different from what we see today. Despite thousands of precision strikes and continuous naval presence, US forces in the region remain relatively light: tens of thousands of troops, two carrier strike groups, and expeditionary units built for rapid response, not for sustained, large-scale war. This is not the force posture for achieving a regime change, destroying nuclear capability or forcing a total surrender.

Speculation abounds that the US is preparing to secure Kharg Island or the Strait of Hormuz. However, such force levels are woefully inadequate for either mission, particularly now, as Iran could have fortified these chokepoints extensively, rendering strategic



or tactical surprise improbable in any amphibious seizure operation. More plausibly, they serve as a "threat in being" to shape ongoing negotiations.

And Iran is no Iraq. As Robert D Kaplan explains in his book *The Revenge of Geography*, Iran's power comes less from ideology than from its terrain and location. It is mountainous, internally cohesive, and sits at the crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean. Its control of the Strait of Hormuz gives it leverage over global energy flows; its network of regional proxies lets it spread the fight far beyond its own borders.

In this case, geography is not theory; it is an active weapon. Even a relatively weaker power like Iran can exert disproportionate influence because geography compresses naval space, especially in the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the US is fighting far from home, across long supply lines and in cramped maritime spaces that favour the defender.

Iran, by contrast, is operating in its own backyard, using proximity, terrain, and chokepoints, such as Hormuz, to offset US technological edge. Matched against these geographical attributes the current US strategy in Iran starts to unravel. The US is leaning heavily on air power, stand-off strikes, and sea dominance in the Arabian Sea to produce outcomes that, in past conflicts, required boots on the ground.

But Schwarzkopf knew that air power is most effective when it prepares the battlefield, not when it pretends to finish the war. Bombing can disrupt, degrade, and confuse an enemy. It cannot seize terrain, impose order, or force a political surrender on its own. No amount of smart weapons can fully erase this geographic advantage.

The effects are already clear. Even after hundreds of strikes, Iran has kept its ability to threaten shipping through Hormuz, harass regional partners, and escalate asymmetrically, from the Gulf to the Red Sea.

The battlespace is widening even as US troop levels stay modest. What we are seeing is not a focused, decisive campaign, but a war that is characterised by stagnation and strategic inertia. None of this is necessarily a sign of military failure.

On the contrary, American commanders are not incompetent and have probably given frank, sober assessments of the risks, costs, and limits of such a campaign. The US military's culture still values professional honesty. But in a democracy, political leadership is in charge. That means sound advice can be heard, weighed, and then set aside in favour of political urgency. That seems to be happening now.

The desire to act fast, show resolve, and get visible results without the full human, financial, and political cost of a larger war has pushed strategy on the back foot. Public communication underlines this problem further. Briefings by the Secretary of War and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs are verbose, full of statistics—numbers of targets hit, sorties flown, and drones shot down—but thin on real strategy or exit scenarios. Counting beans is not the same as explaining a war. In a democracy, these briefings should help citizens understand the risks, choices, and likely endgame.

The imbalance is not just in the military domain. The broader American system of governance shows confusion, too.

The Congress, constitutionally empowered to declare war, has done little more than offer vague, indirect support. The courts, wary of touching national security questions, stay out of the room. Even the wider ecosystem—media, think tanks, civil society, and the national security bureaucracy—has been feeble in its response.

Washington is gambling on a strategy wherein the military is achieving tactical victories but is unable to convert them into a strategic outcome. The problem isn't the advice; it's the leaders who chose to ignore it in favour of political optics.

(The writer is a former Vice Chief of the Indian Army)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

The grandparent's Grand Prix

The race was exhilarating—the curves, the turns, and the rush of speed

PRAVEENA THIMMAIAH

As the holiday season set in, the whirring of go-karts near my bedroom—on the sixth floor of our apartment building—was music to my ears. My husband and I decided to take our grandson Arjun to the go-karting track, and it turned out to be a delightful experience. He is fascinated by these miniature speed machines, and I even joined him for a couple of thrilling rides.

I still remember the first time I got into a go-kart, feeling like a Formula 1 driver—minus the glamour and expertise. The 470-metre track may seem short, but it is long enough to get your adrenaline pumping.

Six laps of pure excitement, and if you're feeling adventurous, you can always go for another round.

Before we began, the instructor explained the safety rules: wear comfortable clothes, tie up loose hair, and most importantly, wear a helmet. They even provide smart helmets that make you feel quite professional.

Once seated, we were guided through the basics—the brake, the accelerator, and the flag signals. With a pull of the starter rope, the engine came alive, and we were off.

The experience was exhilarating—the curves, the turns, and the rush of speed as we approached each bend. Arjun beamed with excitement as we sped along, and I found myself smiling just as widely. Who would have thought that being a grandparent could be this thrilling?

When the ride ended, he immediately asked, "When can we come back?" I knew then that this would not be our last visit. The next time, I let him take the wheel while I watched from the stands, filled with pride.

As he raced past, I kept shouting, "Slow down!", though it had little effect. In fact, he seemed to think I was cheering him on, flashing a thumbs-up as he went by. I was slightly anxious but reassured knowing he had done this before with his parents.

Later, my daughter called and asked me to look out of the window. From a distance, I could see small figures moving swiftly on the track, but one stood out unmistakably—Arjun, racing like a young champion. When I correctly guessed the colour of his shirt, my daughter was amazed. I smiled and said it wasn't my eyesight but my ability to recognise his style.

Watching him brought back memories of my own childhood with my grandparents—days filled with simple joy and warmth. Standing there, I realised it was now our turn to create such memories for him. As his laughter echoed and his joy shone through, I felt deeply grateful. These are the moments that stay with us—the ones that quietly shape a lifetime.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Double engine' is against the spirit of federalism

This refers to 'Centre should view states as coordinates, not subordinates' (Apr 5). The Supreme Court judge Justice Nagarathna's suggestion to the central government that states should be viewed as coordinates and not subordinates is all the more relevant now, where the Modi government rides roughshod over states ruled by opposition parties while mollycoddling the states where the BJP or its allies are in power. The very concept of a 'double engine' government being touted by the PM and his cabinet colleagues goes against the spirit of federalism, as the implication is that if the people of a state vote for the party in power at the Centre, it can expect more progress and development, the converse being that if you vote the opposition in, you might have to expect stepmotherly treatment. The central government has the bounden duty to treat all states alike, and as the learned judge has said, the states should be treated on par with the Centre.
C V Aravind, Bengaluru

Extend Aasare

I refer to 'Bengaluru's Aasare, Police step in for lonely seniors' (Apr 5). The initiative of the Bengaluru police to visit lonely seniors to attend to their needs is a much-needed and commendable step. The administration should consider extending such services throughout the state. As a step further, a list of seniors, persons with disabilities and others temporarily incapacitated due to health reasons, who need a helping hand for different reasons, could be prepared to extend help as needed.
A K Shariff, Mysuru

Reward governance

The recent assurance by Narendra Modi that no state will lose representation in the Lok Sabha is welcome, but it does not go far enough in addressing a deeper question of fairness. Southern states have, for decades, demonstrated exemplary commitment to population stabilisation through effective governance, education, and public health policies. In contrast, states like UP and Bihar stand to gain additional representation under a purely population-based delimitation system. This creates a perverse incentive structure—rewarding demographic expansion while ignoring responsible governance.
K J Haroon Basha, Vaniyambadi (TN)

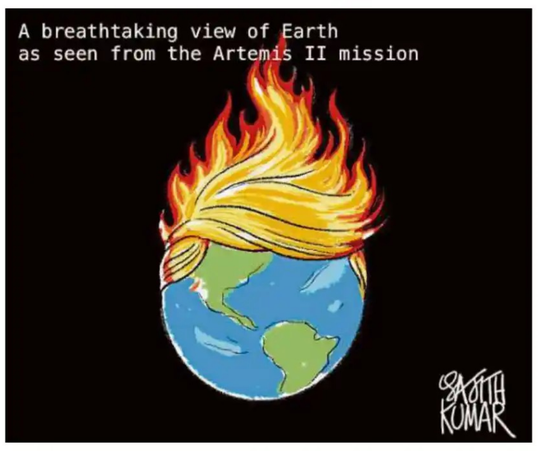
Our readers are welcome to email letters to: **letters@deccanherald.co.in** (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

Prime Minister Modi's vision is of a government without corruption and development without vote-bank politics... We are in politics to place Bharat Mata at the highest pedestal...
Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

Never trust a person that tries to sell you by how righteous they are. I'm telling you right now, it's a scam.
Richie Norton

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

Dishwasher, GDP, and unpaid labour

Recognising invisible household labour, largely performed by women, is critical to India's economic growth

TONY AUGUSTINE

After much deliberation and delay, our household finally welcomed a dishwasher. For my wife, it was a moment of relief; her long-standing demand had been met, and she could now "outsource" part of the daily chores to this shiny new machine. Her happiness came from the hope of reduced burden; mine, curiously enough, from the thought that our purchase had contributed just about Rs 50,000 to India's GDP. A small price, I mused, as India marches towards Viksit Bharat 2047 and the ambition of becoming a $30 trillion economy.

Yet, a closer look at this transaction reveals a paradox. The dishwasher's outcome is a clean plate. When the machine does it, economists count it as part of GDP. When my wife has been doing the same work for years, it counts for nothing. Her effort, born of love and duty, is invisible in the national accounts. The finance minister would be thrilled with the machine's contribution, but unmoved by the countless hours of unpaid labour that sustain households across India. Strange, isn't it? Work done out of affection and necessity is socially invaluable but economically unrecognised.

This paradox is not unique to India. Across the world, economists have long grappled with the invisibility of unpaid household and care work. Some countries have taken steps to address it. Nations like Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom conduct regular 'time-use surveys' to measure unpaid household and caregiving work, quantifying its economic value. Many countries in the European Union maintain "satellite accounts" that estimate the contribution of unpaid labour to GDP, often amounting to billions annually. Nordic countries lead with shared parental leave, subsidised childcare, and flexible work arrangements, which reduce women's disproportionate burden.

Economists have long pointed out the strange way national accounts treat care work. When parents care for their own children, it is considered an act of love, duty, or family responsibility. No money changes hands, so it vanishes from GDP. Yet, if the same parents hire a nanny, suddenly the very same activity – feeding, bathing, teaching, comforting – becomes part of the economy. The difference lies not in the work itself, but in whether a financial transaction occurs.

The United Nations has advanced the "3R" framework – Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute – to guide governments in integrating unpaid care into economic planning. These practices acknowledge that economies are built not only on factories and finance but also on kitchens and care.

Towards nation-building

India, however, remains far behind in recognising this invisible labour. Women here spend nearly five times more hours on unpaid care work than men. Female labour force participation hovers around 20%, one of the lowest in the world, despite rising education levels. Household duties are seen as "natural" responsibilities of women, reinforcing invisibility. The country lacks comprehensive time-use surveys and formal recognition of unpaid work in national accounts. Limited access to childcare, safe transport, and flexible work options keeps women out of formal employment. The result is a vast reservoir of effort that sustains families and communities but remains absent from the economic growth story.

Why does recognition matter? The stakes are enormous. Closing the gender gap in labour participation could add hundreds of billions of dollars to India's GDP. Recognising unpaid work would justify investments in childcare, eldercare, and domestic support services – creating new industries and jobs. Appliances like dishwashers and washing machines are not just conveniences; they are economic enablers, freeing women's time for formal participation. More importantly, recognition validates women's contributions, shifting the narrative from "helping at home" to "building the nation." It reframes household labour not as invisible drudgery but as essential infrastructure for economic growth.

If India is serious about becoming a $30-trillion economy by 2047, it cannot afford to ignore half its population's invisible labour. The path forward is clear. Introduce satellite accounts to measure unpaid household work. Launch reskilling initiatives for women returning to work after caregiving breaks. Invest in community infrastructure – affordable childcare, safe transport, flexible work arrangements. Celebrate women's contributions through awards, incentives, and public campaigns that reframe household labour as nation-building. These steps would not only boost GDP but also create a more just and balanced society.

As India marches towards Viksit Bharat 2047, recognising invisible labour is not charity; it is smart economics. Machines may thrill the finance minister, but it is time the nation acknowledged the invisible hands that have always kept the plates clean and made the nation march ahead.

(The writer is a Bengaluru-based automobile industry professional with a keen interest in circularity and emerging technologies)

As wars rage, a deeper crisis builds beneath geopolitics: Water drought

A RAVINDRA

Even as the war between the US, Israel and Iran disrupts the global supply of oil and gas, a far graver danger looms: depleting water resources. Cities at risk include national capitals such as Tehran in Iran, Jakarta in Indonesia and Delhi in India.

Tehran, now under military attack, is reeling from acute water scarcity, with major reservoirs operating at barely 8-9% capacity. Six consecutive years of drought, compounded by over-extraction of groundwater, inefficient distribution and rapid population growth, have pushed the city towards what is being termed 'water bankruptcy'. The Iranian government is even considering shifting its capital.

In Indonesia, the planned shift from Jakarta—sinking at 15-25 cm annually—to Nusantara, located over 1,000 km away on Borneo Island, is already underway. The crisis stems from rising sea levels, excessive extraction of groundwater and intense flooding. The move is estimated to cost over $33 billion and is expected to be completed by 2045.

Closer home, Delhi's water supply is under severe stress. Despite being on the Yamuna's banks, a city that once enjoyed a 24/7 water supply now rations water as the polluted river has become unfit for consumption. Delhi depends heavily on Haryana and UP. Other Indian cities—Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Pune—also face acute water shortages.

Globally, regions such as North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia are under high water stress. Cities like Cape Town, Cairo and Beijing, along with Los Angeles, Melbourne and São Paulo, are at risk.

As early as 1985, Egypt's then Foreign Minister Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who later became Secretary-General of the United Nations, warned that future Middle East conflicts would centre on water. In 1995, another Egyptian, Ismail Sarageldin of the World Bank, echoed this, predicting that while the 20th-century wars were fought over oil, the 21st-century wars would be over water.

Today's conflicts may be driven by geopolitics and energy, but water is emerging as the underlying fault line. Energy fuels development; without water, life itself halts.

Water conflicts—between nations, states and communities—are already a source of tension. The Nile is shared between Egypt and Ethiopia; the Tigris and Euphrates are shared by Iraq, Syria and Turkey. In South Asia, the Indus and Ganga link India with Pakistan and Bangladesh, respectively, under formal treaties, while transboundary rivers with China lack comprehensive agreements, raising concerns over upstream interventions.

Within India, water-sharing agreements exist between states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu for Cauvery and between Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra for Krishna waters. But when rains fail and farmers suffer from water shortage, conflicts break out, at times with serious consequences, as we have witnessed in the case of reservoirs across the Cauvery getting dry.

Rapid urbanisation is deepening the crisis. Demand for potable and non-potable water is rising, and many cities face the prospect of 'water drought'. A 2018 BBC report listed 11 cities across the globe at risk of running out of water: Beijing, Cairo, Jakarta, Moscow, Istanbul, Mexico City, London, Miami, São Paulo, Tokyo and the only Indian city, Bengaluru. UN-endorsed projections warn that global freshwater demand could exceed supply by 40% by 2030.

Amid war and the energy crisis, the urgency of water must not be overlooked. International cooperation to resolve disputes and honour treaties is essential, as is cooperation within countries.

Cities must fix ageing infrastructure through investments in treatment plants, pipelines and digital leak detection. Conservation measures—rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and desalination—must be scaled up, alongside efforts to curb wastage.

Several countries offer exemplary models: Singapore in recycling, the Netherlands in flood control, and Nordic nations in maintaining water quality. Saudi Arabia has advanced desalination, while Cape Town and Stockholm have reduced water consumption significantly. Israel stands out, recycling nearly 90% of its wastewater and operating extensive desalination systems.

In India, Bengaluru has made strides in lake rejuvenation, thanks largely to the efforts of civil society organisations. The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board recently won the prestigious World Water Award for sustainable water management from the International Water Association (IWA), recognising its achievements in lake rejuvenation, rainwater harvesting and reducing non-revenue water. It also bagged the Climate Smart Utilities Award 2023, awarded by the IWA, for reducing carbon footprint, improving energy efficiency and adopting innovative water management practices in a changing climate.

Given the twin pressures of energy and water scarcity, integrated WATERGY approaches—linking water and energy efficiency—are vital. The United Nations has launched an Alliance Watergy programme to address municipal water challenges through energy and water efficiency partnerships. A Watergy International Group based in Abu Dhabi has developed technology for reducing global warming and boosting green energy production.

With global initiatives already underway, the time is ripe to adopt such strategies across major cities.

(The writer is a former chief secretary, Government of Karnataka)

The convicted sex offender gave Anil Ambani information on appointments and foreign policy. Some seemed prescient; there was no evidence he was close to the administration

Epstein cast himself as a White House insider to Anil Ambani

ANUPREETA DAS

Anil Ambani, one of India's most prominent businesspeople, was eager in the early days of the first Trump administration to figure out where India might fit into the new president's national security strategy. In 2017, that led him to Jeffrey Epstein, the convicted sex offender whose fat Rolodex of politicians, diplomats and policymakers allowed him to present himself to Ambani as a White House insider and guide, according to a review by *The New York Times* of hundreds of messages exchanged by the men over a two-year period.

"Will need ur guidance on dealing wth white house for india relationship ad defense cooperation," Ambani wrote to Epstein soon after their online introduction, according to exchanges released this year by the US Justice Department. Epstein promised to get him some "inside baseball."

The exchanges, riddled with typos and shorthand, show the global reach of Epstein and the reputation he had built among the world's wealthiest people as a power broker able to operate in the shadowy world of back-channel diplomacy. While the line between braggadocio and influence was blurred, Epstein shared with Ambani nuggets of information on foreign policy and Donald Trump appointments before they became widely known.

Anil Ambani exchanged emails with Jeffrey Epstein for more than two years, in 2022. Epstein shared with Ambani nuggets of information before they became widely known. NYT

In March 2017, for example, Ambani asked Epstein if David Petraeus, the former director of the CIA and his preferred candidate for US ambassador to India, would be appointed to the role. "I'll ask," Epstein responded. Not long after, Epstein said he had been "told" that Petraeus was not on the "front burner." The role went to Kenneth I Juster, a business executive and former government official, that November. And in July 2017, Epstein told Ambani that John Bolton, a longtime Republican hawk, would replace Lt Gen H R McMaster as national security adviser. McMaster "was not long for the position" and Bolton was "next," he wrote. Although hawkish conservatives had called for the general's ouster that summer, Trump had defended him. But eight months after Epstein's message, the information proved true: Bolton replaced McMaster.

Epstein also offered to introduce Ambani to individuals known for their proximity to the president, including Steve Bannon and Thomas J Barrack Jr, who served as chair of Trump's inaugural committee in 2017. Epstein also suggested to the two men that they might find it useful to meet Ambani.

For his part, in India, Ambani presented himself as politically connected and a conduit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. He once wrote that "leadership" had asked for Epstein's help in arranging meetings for him with Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, and Bannon.

Ambani did not respond to requests for comment. He has not faced any accusations of criminal or improper behaviour towards women. Bannon and Barrack did not respond to requests for comment. A White House representative directed the *Times* to recent comments from Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, reiterating Trump's frequent denial of any wrongdoing in connection with Epstein.

Sprinkled among Epstein and Ambani's discussions of financial arcana and political strategy, rendered in texting patois, were out-of-context references to having "dessert." Although the digital trail supplies innuendo, it leaves few real clues about the use of the word, which was often mentioned alongside "fun."

The messages provide a partial view into the dealings between the two men, who also spoke on the phone and used encrypted messaging platforms like Signal and Telegram, where Ambani, 66, went by the handle "Armani A." Their conversations came years after Epstein was registered as a sex offender, having served jail time after he pleaded guilty in 2008 to a charge of soliciting prostitution from a minor.

In his exchanges with Epstein, Ambani, the younger brother of Mukesh Ambani, India's richest man, appeared to be looking to bolster his global reputation. After their father died without a clear will for the empire he founded, Reliance Industries, their mother in 2005 divvied up the businesses, which ranged from telecommunications to oil refining, between the siblings.

Epstein and Ambani were connected by Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, who stepped down in February as chair and CEO of DP World, a Dubai-based ports company, after his ties to Epstein were revealed.

Ambani and Epstein's messages about who would become the next US ambassador to India were some of the earliest conversations they had. Ambani was interested in defence policy because he had landed a parts manufacturing deal in 2016 for Rafale fighter jets. Critics accused the Modi government, which had agreed to buy the jets from France, of favouring Ambani, which it denied.

The US ambassador pick for India was "key" for him, Ambani wrote. He said he wanted a "strong person" like Petraeus "to deal wth" Pakistan and other neighbours. When Epstein told Ambani that Petraeus was an unlikely choice, he said he was told that although "Donald liked him," the Pentagon was "wary," adding that his use of "tradecraft email sticks in their craw," without explaining. During the back-and-forth, Ambani asked Epstein: "Who do u suggest?"

"A tall Swedish blonde woman to make it fun to visit," the disgraced financier replied within seconds. "Arrange that," Ambani said. Epstein used the opportunity to ask if there was an actress or model "that represents your proclivity." He said he would be "of no good" if Ambani liked Meryl Streep.

Ambani replied that he had "better taste," mentioning that Scarlett Johansson was starring in a movie backed by one of his companies.

The Israel Connection

In 2017, as plans were being made for Modi to visit the US, Trump was already trying to isolate Iran and wanted countries to embrace Israel more. In some messages included in the files, Epstein appeared to advise Ambani that India's buying more weapons from Israel might make the White House view the country more favourably. "What i am told is that discussions re israel strategy were dominating modi dates," he wrote on March 29.

Modi travelled to Washington for his first sit-down with Trump in late June. Soon after, he became the first Indian PM to visit Israel, signifying a shift from India's neutral stance on Middle East politics.

Afterward, Epstein wrote to "Jabor Y" — identified elsewhere in the Epstein files as Jabor Yousef Jassim Al Thani, a businessperson and member of the Qatari royal family — that Qatar should "stop kicking and arguing," and that it needed to "come out against terrorism." At the time, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies, backed by Trump, had accused Qatar of supporting terrorism because of its friendly relations with Iran and blockaded it. Epstein used Modi as an example, saying that he "took advice" and "danced and sang in Israel" after meeting the US president. "IT WORKED," he wrote. India agreed to buy weapons and intelligence equipment worth roughly $2 billion that year.

After Modi's name surfaced in the trove of Epstein documents released in January, India's External Affairs Ministry called the messages "trashy ruminations of a convicted sex offender."

Ambani's aspirations to bolster his recognition on the international stage run through his exchanges with Epstein. When the latter asked him if he belonged to any US think tanks, Ambani bragged about how he was the "only Indian" on the Atlantic Council advisory board, and invited Epstein's opinions on other organisations. Epstein offered to introduce Ambani to William J Burns, who was then the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Thomas J Pritzker, the chair of the board of trustees at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. (Pritzker stepped down as executive chair of the Hyatt Hotels Corp in February, citing his ties to Epstein. In 2023, Burns said he "deeply" regretted meeting Epstein.)

Epstein also invited Ambani to dinners at his house, where he could mingle with politicians and other leaders. Epstein told Ambani that he had asked Rod-Larsen, who ran the International Peace Institute, to be his "sherpa." Rod-Larsen stepped down from the think tank in 2020 after his financial ties to Epstein were discovered.

Ambani communicated frequently with Epstein in 2019 as his business struggled; he required a bailout from his brother, Mukesh, to pay $79 million after a court order over an unpaid debt.

Epstein sent sympathetic messages, telling Ambani to stay "mentally strong." He repeatedly offered advice, but underscored that he was acting only as a friend.

When Ambani asked if Epstein could help raise US corporate financing, the financier suggested options like creating bankruptcy-proof vehicles, but pointed out tax implications.

The messages provide no indication that Ambani offered to pay Epstein for advice, but on April 20, 2019, Epstein wrote: "No money for me. I have enough." Around two weeks later, Epstein received an email from a sender named Anil. "Dear Jeffrey," it read. "Transaction done. Will come to say Hello and have coffee."

In that interaction from early May, Epstein offered to "devote as much time as needed" on May 23, the day of India's general election results when the two planned to meet in New York, "again, only as a friend."

Ambani visited Epstein at his Manhattan mansion at 4:30 pm, according to multiple emails, before Modi's landslide electoral win was announced.

The next day, Epstein suggested to Bannon that he meet Modi, and offered to set up a meeting. Modi's "guy" had told him that the Indian prime minister's main challenge was China, he told Bannon, noting the two had a shared interest.

On July 3, 2019, Epstein checked in with Ambani to ask if he was taking "rest time." When Ambani responded that he was working, Epstein sent an old-school smiley face, ":)".

Three days later, Epstein was arrested on charges of the sex trafficking of minors.

The New York Times

What Raghav Chadha's ouster signals for AAP

ADITYA MUKHERJEE

The sudden removal of Raghav Chadha as the Aam Aadmi Party's deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha has set tongues wagging in political circles, raising an uncomfortable question for the party: is all well within its tightly controlled inner circle?

For a party that has carefully cultivated an image of ideological cohesion and disciplined messaging under the stewardship of Arvind Kejriwal, even a whiff of internal discord is enough to trigger speculation. And in politics, as they say, there's rarely smoke without fire.

Chadha, long regarded as one of the party's most articulate and media-savvy faces, is no ordinary functionary. Young, sharp, and telegenic, he has been among the AAP's most effective communicators since 2014 — whether taking on opponents in televised debates or raising people-centric issues in Parliament. His interventions have often reflected the party's core plank: governance rooted in public welfare rather than political theatrics. That makes his abrupt exit from the Rajya Sabha not just a procedural matter but a political signal.

Official explanations, as expected, have been measured and non-committal. Yet, within the labyrinth of Indian politics, absence often speaks louder than presence. Chadha's reported absence from key party meetings in recent months has only added fuel to the fire. For a party where central leadership calls the shots and dissent is rarely aired in public, such gaps are conspicuous.

The question that naturally follows is whether Chadha's equation with Kejriwal has hit the buffers. Kejriwal's detractors have often portrayed him as a leader intolerant of criticism, one who brooks no dissent within the party. In 2015, several founding members of the party were shown the door after airing their differences with Arvind Kejriwal. Some went so far as to liken the party to a "Khap Panchayat" and alleged that it had degenerated into a "dictatorship" under Kejriwal's leadership. While neither Chaddha nor Kejriwal has publicly acknowledged any rift, political observers are reading between the lines. AAP, unlike older parties with entrenched factions, has historically projected unity as its strength. But as the party expands beyond Delhi into states like Punjab, the pressures of growth inevitably test internal equations.

Leadership in a rapidly scaling political outfit is a delicate balancing act. Emerging leaders often walk a tightrope — expected to grow in stature yet not cast shadows that are too long. Chadha's rising national profile, his frequent visibility in policy debates, and his appeal among urban voters may have inadvertently altered internal dynamics. In politics, proximity to power can be both an asset and a liability.

There is also the larger context to consider. AAP has, in recent times, found itself navigating turbulent waters — legal challenges, governance scrutiny, and electoral ambitions beyond its traditional strongholds. In such a scenario, leadership tends to consolidate control rather than diffuse it. Decisions that appear abrupt on the surface may, in fact, be part of a broader strategy to tighten the party's command structure.

Yet, sidelining a leader like Chadha carries its own risks. Political parties thrive not just on central authority but also on the diversity of voices within. Chadha represents a generation of politicians who are fluent in both policy and communication—a rare combination in today's landscape. His ability to connect complex issues with everyday concerns has made him a valuable asset, particularly in urban constituencies where AAP seeks to expand.

If his removal is indeed indicative of deeper tensions, it raises uncomfortable questions about how AAP manages internal dissent and ambition. Is the party inadvertently clipping the wings of its own rising stars? Or is this merely a temporary recalibration, with Chadha expected to return to the fold once the dust settles?

For now, both leaders have chosen silence over speculation. But in politics, silence is seldom neutral — it is often strategic. Whether this episode is a storm in a teacup or the beginning of a more pronounced shift within AAP remains to be seen.

What is clear, however, is that the party stands at a crossroads. As it aspires to transition from a regional force to a national contender, it must navigate the complexities that come with scale — managing ambition, maintaining cohesion, and sustaining its founding ethos. The handling of leaders like Chadha will be a litmus test of that evolution.

In the end, politics is as much about perception as it is about reality. And right now, the perception that something is amiss within AAP is gaining ground. Whether Kejriwal and his team can nip this in the bud or whether it snowballs into a larger narrative will shape the party's trajectory in the months ahead.

(The writer is a Delhi-based journalist)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: APRIL 1976

Norodom resigns as Cambodian Head of State

Bangkok, April 5
Phnom Penh Radio today announced the resignation of Prince Norodom Sihanouk and his replacement as Cambodian Head of State by Vice-Premier Khieu Samphan. A communiqué signed by Minister of Information Hu Nim said that Prince Sihanouk had made known his wish to retire "after 30 years of service to the Cambodian fatherland." The Cabinet meeting under Premier Penn Nouth on April 4, accepted the Prince's request and decided to grant him a quarterly allowance of $2,000.

25 YEARS AGO: APRIL 2001

Govt invites J&K ultras, Hurriyat leaders for talks

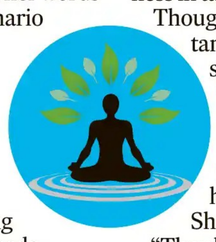
New Delhi, April 5
In a major policy initiative to break the deadlock on the Jammu and Kashmir front, the Union Government today invited Kashmir militant organisations and the Hurriyat Conference for talks without preconditions. Planning Commission Deputy Chairman K C Pant will hold talks with the parties involved in the Kashmir issue, a government statement issued here said. The government is also keen on a bilateral dialogue with Islamabad but set the rider that it should curb cross-border terrorism.

OASIS | ROHINI S MURTHY

Dharma in deeds, not words

'Actions prove who someone is; words just prove who they want to be.' Such random quotes often pop up as WhatsApp forwards or good morning messages. While most are not worth a second glance, some quotes compel me to think. Until recently, I had presumed that the word 'action' itself evokes a negative connotation. But this myth was thankfully broken by my yoga instructor. Every class, he would begin by saying, 'One small action can usher in great results.' He was referring to the positive action we take every day of attending his classes.

In another context, my grandmother would often say in Kannada that there are two kinds of people in this world – talkers and doers. I comprehended the true meaning of her words when I learnt about the scenario in my cousin's house.



My cousin's mother-in-law, who is in her late 70s, lives alone. Two of her sons live abroad, while the youngest son, who is a government employee, stays in a nearby town. Being the first responder to her needs, my cousin's husband has been the epitome of a dutiful son as long as I have known him. But every time I spoke to his mother, she would invariably talk about her older sons, appreciating their 'plans' for her and their promptness in talking to her every day.

Though I was intrigued by the blatant disregard for her youngest son, I remained quiet, hoping that time may wipe out her mental haze. As years rolled by, gifts and gadgets arrived promptly from abroad while her sons' visits became fewer. She justified this by saying, "They have high-paying jobs and other commitments, so it's difficult for them to visit me."

Unmindful of his mother's prejudice and his siblings' ostentatious behaviour, the youngest son continues to attend to her. His 'doer' mentality speaks volumes about his love and dharma vis-à-vis the 'talkers' who merely claim loyalty and concern. Isn't it time that we make a clear distinction between 'performative' love and selfless duty and love?

Like our yoga teacher says, right action embodies proof of commitment and care, while words can merely dazzle. When it comes to caring for our loved ones, I am trying my best to follow this simple yet profound quote by Benjamin Franklin - "Well done is better than well said."

Punjab rice exporters ask Centre to arrange a barter system with Iran

Under the deal, Indian rice would be exchanged for Iranian crude oil

AJITH ATHRADY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Punjab Rice Millers Exporters Association has urged the Centre to arrange a barter agreement with Iran, under which Indian rice would be exchanged for Iranian crude oil.

In a letter to Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, the association said the barter deal would help ease India's oil crisis and revive traditional trade ties with Iran.

It would also enable farmers to clear stocks of Basmati rice from the previous season ahead of the new kharif sowing season in May, the association said.

WAR SHOCKS

Since India resumed buying Iranian oil following the US waiver of sanctions, Indian traders have been demanding that the Centre restore trade with Iran.

Exporters have expressed serious concern over Iran's continued restrictions in the Strait of Hormuz, as more than 80% of India's Basmati rice exports are destined for West Asian countries stranded at ports or on the high seas. This has caused massive financial losses to exporters, the association said.

The Centre on Saturday said that Indian refiners are buying crude oil from Iran as part of their efforts to secure oil supplies amid disruptions in energy flows due to the ongoing war in West Asia, and that there are no payment-related difficulties in paying for Iranian oil.

The Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas also dismissed reports that an India-bound oil tanker carrying Iranian crude had rerouted mid-voyage to China due to "payment issues".

Govt steps up 5 kg LPG supply, says 6.6L sold since March 23

The Centre on Sunday said that 5 kg LPG (FTL) cylinders are now available at LPG distributorships on showing valid ID proof.

According to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, over 6.6 lakh such 5 kg cylinders have been sold since March 23. It clarified that these small cylinders are sold at market rates and do not require address proof. On April 4 alone, more than 90,000 units of 5 kg FTL cylinders were sold, the ministry said.

It said there are no reports of shortages at LPG distributor points, with more than 51 lakh domestic cylinders delivered during the day and online bookings accounting for 95% of total demand.

Commercial LPG supplies have been capped at 70% of pre-crisis levels, with smaller cylinders being made widely available to ease pressure on demand. On natural gas, the government said full supplies are being maintained for households and transport.

Iranian foreign minister dials Jaishankar

NEW DELHI, PTI: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani on Sunday and discussed the West Asia conflict amid US President Donald Trump's fresh ultimatum to Iran demanding the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

He also held a phone conversation with UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

It is understood that the conflict's impact on global energy supplies figured prominently in the talks.

"Received a call from Foreign Minister @araghchi of Iran. Discussed the present situation," Jaishankar said on social media without elaborating.

The Iranian embassy in New Delhi said the two foreign ministers discussed bilateral relations as well as regional and international developments.

"Had a telecon on the ongoing conflict with PM & FM @MBA_AlThani_of Qatar this evening," Jaishankar said on social media. Al Thani is also Qatar's foreign minister.

Centre reviews crop damage from heavy rain and hailstorm

NEW DELHI, DHNS: Taking note of the crop losses due to heavy rainfall and hailstorms across several states, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday directed his ministry officials to conduct a comprehensive review of the damages and coordinate with state authorities to gather ground-level information.

Chouhan instructed officials to reach out to the state governments concerned to compile comprehensive damage assessments, according to a Ministry of Agriculture statement.

The minister also held discussions with the agriculture ministers of the affected states over the extent of crop damage, the statement added.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has warned that a fresh Western Disturbance will affect Northwest India from April 7, triggering widespread rainfall, thunderstorms, and hailstorms across J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh through April 10.

Heavy rainfall warnings remain in force for Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala, and Mahe through April 6 and for Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Meghalaya through April 9-10.

Interior Karnataka, Telangana, and Rayalaseema could face continued thunderstorm activity through the week.

Akhilesh seeks Census before women's quota in legislature

SANJAY PANDEY
LUCKNOW, DHNS

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks that the Budget session of Parliament had been extended for three days to enable the implementation of the Women's Reservation law enacted in 2023, Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav questioned the basis of the proposed quota, saying that a new census was essential before it.

Akhilesh Yadav

In a post on his official X handle on Sunday, Akhilesh said any policy must be based on correct statistics, not old figures.

He said that the structure of the law, meant to provide 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures, would be "faulty" if it were based on figures from the 2011 Census.

"We demand that the issue of women's reservation be taken up after a new Census," he added.

He said the BJP-led government at the Centre didn't want to give reservations to women and was "cheating" them.

Earlier, Modi had said that the Budget session had been extended for three days to enable implementation of the Women's Reservation law in 2029. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju informed the Rajya Sabha that the House would meet soon to take an important Bill. The Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) Amendment Act was passed by Parliament in 2023.

Cong calls LS seat hike a 'weapon of mass distraction'

Says delimitation could widen gap between states

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Congress on Sunday doubled down its attack on the proposal to increase Lok Sabha seats by 50%, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "bulldozing" a move that benefits only large and populous states, while terming it as "Weapon of Mass Distraction".

General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said the proposal was being pushed through in Parliament on April 16-18 without "meaningful consultations and widespread public debate".

In a post on X, he claimed that the PM is up to his "usual tricks of making misleading statements that are meant to deceive". At an election rally in Kerala on Saturday, Modi said that his government will ensure in Parliament that no state, whether it is Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, or Telangana, will see a reduction in Lok Sabha seats.

"This is hoodwinking the people of the country in which the Prime Minister has unique expertise. For example, the difference between UP's and Kerala's seats in the Lok Sabha is now 60. Modi's proposal will increase it to 90. Similarly, the difference between UP and Tamil Nadu will increase from 39 to at least 59. Such examples can be multiplied," he said.

POLICY PUSH

- **Centre plans to increase Lok Sabha seats by 50%, raising concerns about unequal representation**
- **Smaller states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana, and northeast regions may see their relative influence decline**
- **UP's seats could rise from 80 to 90, widening the disparity with states like Kerala (20 seats) and Tamil Nadu (21 seats)**

Alleging that Modi is "bulldozing a proposal that will work more to the benefit" of larger and populous states since their already large numbers will get "further magnified", he said it is not just South India but states like Punjab and Haryana and those in the north-east that will also see their relative influence decline.

"The nation is facing a serious economic and foreign policy crisis. All that the PM is bothered about is pushing through an increase in the strength of the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas without meaningful consultations and widespread public debate. This is nothing but a Weapon of Mass Distraction (WMD)," he said.

"The framing must be how much will Southern India, Western India, North Eastern India and North Western India lose in terms of political heft as compared to the Hindi heartland states of India in terms of the gap in the number of Parliamentary seats between them and the Hindi heartland states," Congress MP Manish Tewari said.

The Chandigarh MP noted that states and UTs like Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Delhi together have just 40 seats in Lok Sabha, as opposed to Uttar Pradesh's 80, and said, "This gap will only further increase" post delimitation.

With more Opposition parties critiquing the proposal, the government may have to sweat it out to ensure a two-thirds majority in Parliament to get the Constitution amendment bills. At present, the ruling NDA has 293 MPs and would need the support of the 234-strong Opposition to clear the Bills.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has called a meeting of the party's senior MPs on April 9, followed by deliberations with Opposition parties before Parliament reconvenes on April 16.

P CHIDAMBARAM
Congress MP

"The proposal to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha from 548 (current strength 543) to 816 is retrograde and will widen the difference between the more populous States and the Southern States that have stabilised their population.

SPARKS FLY

A goods truck catches fire on the Borio highway, in Sahibganj, Jharkhand, on Sunday. PTI

'Help airlines launch global flights from other hubs'

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

With the West Asia conflict impacting air traffic, a Parliamentary panel has urged the Central government to incentivise Indian airlines to launch and expand widebody services from emerging and secondary hubs like Bengaluru and Chennai to Europe and North America within a year and "progressively reduce" dependence on Gulf transit.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture said roughly half of India's international passenger traffic currently transits through Gulf hubs.

The airspace closure in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE and Israel that started on February 28 shut down the primary air corridor linking Asia, Europe, and Africa, forcing airlines to reroute westbound flights via the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean airspace.

Parliamentary panel proposes

- Roughly half of India's international passenger traffic currently transits through Gulf hubs
- Airspace closure in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE and Israel that started on Feb 28 shut down primary air corridor linking Asia, Europe, Africa
- Airlines should launch, expand widebody services from emerging, secondary hubs to Europe and N America
- Develop comprehensive inter-ministerial Aviation Resilience and Diversification Framework
- Conclude overflight, traffic-right arrangements with non-Gulf nodes for when Gulf hubs are compromised

This has added two to four hours of flight time and substantially increased fuel consumption, the committee, headed by JD(U) MP Sanjay Jha, said in its report tabled in Parliament late March.

It urged the government to develop a comprehensive inter-ministerial Aviation Resilience and Diversification Framework (ARDF) in coordination with the Ministries of Petroleum and Natural Gas, External Affairs and Home Affairs, the Airports Authority of India, and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to tackle eventualities in such a scenario.

The frameworks should "incentivise" Indian carriers to launch and expand direct wide-body services from emerging and secondary hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata and Pune to Europe and North America within 12 months, "progressively reducing dependence on Gulf transit", the report said.

Scrutinising the Demands for Grants (2026-27) for the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the report recalled that Turkish Airlines continued operations via Istanbul, and European carriers Air France, Lufthansa and British Airways maintained US–India connectivity by entirely avoiding the Gulf airspace, "demonstrating the viability of non-Gulf routing".

It also said overflight and traffic-right arrangements with non-Gulf nodes — Istanbul, Athens, Frankfurt in Europe; Nairobi in Africa; and Singapore in South-East Asia — to provide contingency connectivity when Gulf hubs are compromised should be concluded.

The government has already identified 'safe airports', including Muscat, Fujairah, Ras al Khaimah, Jeddah, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi for consolidation and evacuation, a model that should be institutionalised, it said.

Rail Neer scam: CIC pulls up IRCTC for denying RTI data

NEW DELHI, PTI: The Central Information Commission has pulled up the IRCTC, the catering arm of the Indian Railways, over the denial of information on an RTI plea seeking to know if companies bidding for railway tenders had disclosed their alleged links to the Rail Neer 'scam' and related cases probed by central agencies.

The RTI applicant had asked the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation if the bidders clearly mentioned the CBI or ED cases against their names, if any, in their tender documents.

The Rail Neer 'scam' was a 2015 corruption case investigated by the CBI, in which private catering companies supplied cheap bottled water instead of the mandated 'Rail Neer' on premium trains (Rajdhani and Shatabdi), causing the Indian Railways a loss of about Rs 19.5 crore.

The RTI specifically asked if the bidders declared that they were "accused in the famous Rail Neer scam" and that the CBI had "registered an FIR against them".

It also asked if they disclosed that the ED had "registered a case under sections 120B read with Section 420 of the IPC and 13(2) read with 13(1)(d) of the Prevention of Corruption Act".

The applicant also sought to know if the bidders informed the authorities about the developments in these cases, such as raids, cash seizures, and whether a "chargesheet" or "complaint" had been filed in the court by the agencies.

The IRCTC, however, denied the data, saying, "The information sought is exempted from disclosure as per Section 8 (d) of the RTI Act, 2005."

Section 8(1)(d) of the RTI Act, 2005, exempts information from disclosure that includes commercial confidence, trade secrets, or intellectual property, if revealing it would harm the competitive position of a third party. It protects sensitive business data held by public authorities unless a larger public interest warrants its disclosure.

The respondent officials defended their stand, submitting that they had "categorically informed the appellant" about the exemption, and that the first appellate authority had upheld the reply.

Examining the matter, the CIC found the response inadequate, noting that it "merely states the exemption clause without providing any reasons or justification whatsoever".

LEARN AND EARN

J&K youths rewire aspirations after militancy decline

ZULFIKAR MAJID
SRINAGAR, DHNS

Not long ago, summer in Jammu and Kashmir meant protest calendars, shutdowns, and young men on the streets. Today, the crowds have shifted to examination halls.

Across Srinagar and district towns, coaching centres for UPSC, JKPSC, NEET, and other competitive exams are witnessing a steady surge in enrolment.

From civil services to medicine and engineering, a growing number of young Kashmiris are investing time and effort in structured career paths.

"This is the most visible shift in years," said a Srinagar-based coaching-institute owner. "Students are more focused, more disciplined, and thinking long-term."

The numbers reflect this change. In the 2025 UPSC Civil Services Examination, 16 candidates from J&K qualified, matching one of the highest tallies from the region in recent years. The consistency in selections over the past few years points to a steady pipeline of aspirants entering India's top administrative services.

Medical coaching has seen a similar boom. NEET preparation centres in Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag report full batches, with many students even opting for repeat attempts to improve scores.

This transformation comes alongside a sharp decline in local militant recruitment — from around 200 local recruits in 2018 to single digits two years ago and almost nil in the past year, according to official estimates.

On the ground, the change is also social. Police and paramilitary recruitment drives now draw thousands of applicants. Recruitment rallies continue to see strong participation, even from areas that once witnessed unrest.

Prof Gul Wani, former head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Kashmir, characterised this as a shift toward "aspirational stability", where young people are choosing predictable career paths over uncertain alternatives.

The contrast with the 2008-2018 period is stark, he said. The 2016 unrest, in particular, saw numerous youths drawn into cycles of protest and confrontation. Today, many from that generation — and those younger — are focused on exams, results, and job notifications.

Yet, rising aspiration is running up against structural limits. Recruitment for Class-III and Class-IV government jobs — once a key employment avenue — has declined sharply, pushing more candidates toward highly competitive exams like the civil services, banking, and medicine. The result is thousands vying for a limited number of posts.

Coaching centres have mushroomed to meet demand, but affordability remains a concern, especially for students from poor families. Experts also caution that the heavy tilt toward government employment may limit diversification into private enterprise.

Still, for many young Kashmiris, the choice is straightforward. "A government job — or a professional degree — offers stability, dignity, and upward mobility. Families increasingly see education as the safest and most reliable investment," said Wani.

Wangchuk calls for equal rights for Ladakh

KARGIL, PTI: Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk was accorded a warm welcome in Kargil on Sunday, where he called for unity across Ladakh and the country and reiterated the demand for democratic and constitutional rights for the Union Territory.

This marked Sonam Wangchuk's first Kargil-visit after his release on March 14, following nearly six months of detention in Jodhpur jail.

Sonam Wangchuk

Leaders of the Kargil Democratic Alliance and Leh Apex Body, which are spearheading an agitation in support of their demands including statehood for Ladakh and extension of the 6th schedule of the constitution to the region, pressed for the next round of talks with the High Powered Committee.

Wangchuk emphasised unity across Ladakh.

"The rights that Ladakh deserves, democratic rights, constitutional rights, and rights over its resources, should be ensured just like in the rest of the country," he said.

Liquor scam: Kejriwal to argue his case in Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, DHNS: After West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Monday will argue his own case in Delhi High Court seeking recusal of Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma from the hearing of appeal against him and others on their discharge in the liquor scam case.

Kejriwal and others, including former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, had earlier written to Delhi High Court Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya seeking transfer of the appeal filed by the CBI from Justice Sharma's bench to an "impartial bench", but was denied.

Arvind Kejriwal

AAP said Kejriwal and others, who were discharged by a special court here in the liquor scam case, have moved an application seeking Justice Sharma's recusal in the case and the party chief will argue the case.

The former Delhi Chief Minister arguing the case himself will be the second such instance in recent times when a top politician appeared before a court after Mamata argued before the Supreme Court in the case related to the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal.

In February, a special court had discharged Kejriwal and others in the case and pulled up the CBI by stating that its case was wholly unable to survive judicial scrutiny and stood discredited in its entirety.

'Ensure fairness'

In their letter earlier, Kejriwal and others had accused Justice Sharma of "bias" and demanded that the case should be heard by an impartial bench to ensure fairness and protect public confidence in the administration of justice.

They claimed several orders passed by the judge in the same matter have been overturned by the Supreme Court. They said they were making the request due to a "serious and genuine concern" that the matter "may not receive a completely impartial hearing".

According to the letter, an AAP statement earlier said the CBI filed a petition of about 50 pages challenging the discharge order but did not point out any specific errors in the trial court's findings or evidence that would justify setting aside the discharge order.

Public jobs are scarce & compassion, grace or charity has no place in it: SC

Pulls up constable aspirant over his conduct, sets aside Delhi High Court order

ASHISH TRIPATHI
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Supreme Court has said that grace, charity, or compassion ought to stay at a distance in matters of public employment if a level playing field was to be secured.

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma said, "Public employment is scarce. The youth of the country eagerly await such employment opportunities, as and when they come, with fervent hopes for a brighter future."

In such cases, the stakes were high. Opportunities like these could be life-changing for young people. When chances were rare, one needed to grab them with both hands, it said.

It set aside a Delhi High Court order that directed Delhi's commissioner of police to conduct a physical endurance and measurement test (PE&MT) that constable aspirant Uttam Kumar missed as he had a cough and cold, fever, headache, body pain, and dizziness.

Kumar contended that since he belonged to a backward community, the Central Administrative Tribunal and the Delhi HC were right in exercising discretion in his favour.

"Merely because one belongs to the backward community cannot be the decisive factor for tilting the scales. The boundaries for exercise of discretion are well carved out beyond which the adjudicatory fora ought not to trench," the bench said.

The court found that the appeal presented a classic example of how irresponsible an individual could be.

The respondent was scheduled to appear for the test on January 14, 2024. He sought to submit three representations on January 13, 14, and 25, 2024. He was advised to take the PE&MT on the reserve day, or 15 days could be given to him to recover.

He was able to move around on January 13, but not on January 14.

Such being the position, at least an effort should have been made by the respondent to remain physically present on the scheduled date of the PE&MT. He, however, abstained and was, in the court's opinion, rightly marked "absent", it said.

The court held that the non-communication of any decision on any of the representations, on facts and in the circumstances, did not clothe the tribunal to give the order it did while disposing of the original application, throwing the process asunder.

Not showing up and expecting a second chance clearly demonstrated a lack of drive and initiative on the respondent's part, said the bench.

Gujarat ATS arrests suspect linked to Pakistani gangster

AHMEDABAD, DHNS: The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) arrested a wanted suspect on Sunday who is said to have links with a gangster based in Pakistan. Police say this gangster has been involved in grenade attacks on security forces across Punjab, allegedly at the request of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

A team of ATS officers arrested Bikramjit Singh, an Amritsar resident working as a laborer at a dhaba in Deesa, north Gujarat's Banaskantha district, based on the information provided by Punjab police.

During preliminary questioning, the accused has disclosed his alleged involvement with a network linked to Pakistani gangster Shehzad Bhatti and his associate Abid Jutt, who smuggled grenades from across the border to target security agencies in Punjab, the ATS said.

Singh also used to recruit locals in Punjab "into the organised crime network for Bhatti and Jutt and played a key role in conspiracies to attack police stations and other security units as per their instructions," the ATS stated in a statement.

According to the agency, Bhatti worked for ISI and "carried out terrorist activities for ISI in Punjab." Currently he is orchestrating grenade attacks on security units, police stations, and prominent persons in Punjab," ATS officials said.

Now, ED joins 'godman' Ashok Kharat probe

MRITYUNJAY BOSE
MUMBAI, DHNS

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Sunday the Enforcement Directorate would join the investigation against self-styled godman Ashok Kharat. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) is already probing the cases against him.

"The ED will investigate the antecedents of Kharat's assets... The ED has taken cognizance and necessary action has been initiated. All of Kharat's bank accounts have come to our notice and we have identified the transactions through them," Fadnavis, who is also the state's Home Minister, told reporters in Nashik on Sunday.

Kharat's name has also surfaced in alleged hawala transactions.

On the SIT probe, the chief minister said that more individuals are coming forward with information about Kharat, and "around 12 cases have been registered so far".

"The SIT is receiving a lot of inputs, and we will not stop until we dig out the root of this issue. Strict punishment will be given in cases involving misconduct or atrocities against women," he said.

Fadnavis also said that the CDR leak would be investigated.

On Friday, social activist Anjali Damania said she had received Kharat's call detail record, which showed that the 'godman' exchanged 17 calls with Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and 117 calls with NCP's Rupali Chakankar.

"The leak... will be probed and strict action will be taken. No one has the right to access CDRs, only authorised agencies may do so. How this data was leaked and by whom will be investigated by the state government," Fadnavis said.

The self-styled godman-cum-astrologer was arrested in March after a married woman accused him of raping her repeatedly over three years. A total of eight FIRs have been registered against him so far.

Suspended Bihar DSP's maid came to work in SUV, probe finds

ABHAY KUMAR
PATNA

The maid of a suspended DSP in Bihar used an SUV to come to work, investigations have revealed.

Gautam Kumar, who is facing a Rs 80-crore disproportionate assets case, was recently suspended.

An Economic Offence Unit team, which is conducting, has got evidence of his investments in the name of his maid Paro, alias Puja, besides his wife Ruby Kashyap and a girlfriend, with whom he reportedly has a child.

The three-member investigating team, led by Additional Superintendent of Police Indra Prakash, has found during its investigation that the maid came to work in an SUV. The DSP, who was posted in Kishanganj, had also purchased plots in the name of his maid.

The investigation has revealed that Gautam had purchased 16 plots worth several crores in the name of his wife Ruby, his girlfriend, mother-in-law Poonam Devi and son Siddhartha Gautam.

The EOU officials could not trace the maid, who is originally from West Bengal.

Gautam joined Bihar police as an inspector in 1994 and was promoted as DSP in due course of time.

"An EOU team is in Kishanganj for investigation into the SDPO's DA case. More skeletons will tumble out in the next few days which will help us make a list of his benami investments in Bihar, Bengal, Nepal and Uttar Pradesh," said the Additional Director General (ADG) of Economic Offences Unit (EOU), Nayyar Hasnain Khan.

MISCELLANY

◆COMICS◆

Blondie

WOW! AN iPHONE 17 PRO! THANKS!
A NEW VLOGGING VIDEO CAMERA LENS, YAY!
GREAT JOB WITH THE CHRISTMAS GIFTS THIS YEAR, HONEY
THANKS
BUT YOUR STOCKING ISN'T OVERFLOWING WITH THE USUAL COLD CUTS
Prime Steak & Sausage Co.
THE DAY AIN'T OVER YET!

Hagar The Horrible

Beetle Bailey

WHAT'S THAT?
I DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY BUXLEY A NICE PRESENT, SO I'M REGIFTING
DO YOU REALLY THINK SHE'LL LIKE A SOCKET WRENCH SET?
GREG + MORT WALKER

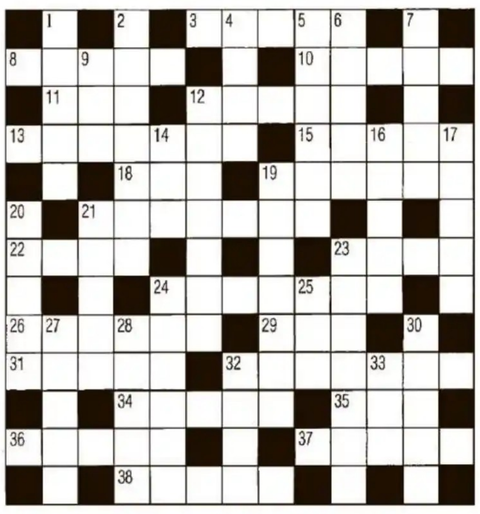
Peanuts

LET'S TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR THE KICKOFF...
INSTEAD OF HAVING SOMEONE HOLD THE BALL WITH HIS FINGER, LET'S USE A KICKING TEE...
A KICKING TEE...RIGHT!
SCHULZ

Marvin

ACTUALLY HAVING TO WALK AROUND IN A WINTER WONDERLAND MAKES ME UNDERSTAND WHY THE HIGHLIGHT OF THAT SONG IS DREAMING ABOUT A FIRE

CROSSWORD CHALLENGE 12388



CRYPTIC

ACROSS
3 Bus or train (5)
8 Backward maybe, but she's the woman for many a man (5)
10 A proper knockout, perhaps (5)
11 Mechanical part, maybe on a bridge (3)
12 Flier's short way to enter the navy (5)
13 Cheerful in putting a bit by (7)
15 Borders can be grand with seed scattered around (5)
18 Female from Passchendaele (3)
19 Customer's legal right to be in court (6)
21 Roaring years? (7)
22 Couple of ducks making spectacles of themselves? (4)
23 Complacent about a treatment for the gums (4)
24 Despite that withered appearance, she's sweet (7)
26 Could be the nicest creature (6)
29 Turn again to the river (3)
31 Teacher accepting thanks for something noteworthy (5)
32 Where to shop around in a scared scamper? (7)
34 The "up" side? (5)
35 Needlework importer's name (3)
36 For me, perhaps, it's a preface (5)
37 Aimed to distribute newspapers, etc. (5)
38 Passed, albeit exhausted (5)

DOWN
1 Manly enough to master some gauchos (5)
2 Speed zero in a car, since it's in mothballs (7)
4 Chap to roam with? (4)
5 Can you credit eels getting into them? (6)
6 Language of the Chindits? (5)
7 That polish which brings a female some men (5)
9 His name can be said without a hiss (3)
12 Allow others to use our tent (4,3)
14 For each person with no heir (3)
16 She puts decoration into the new age (5)
17 Put on new gates (5)
19 A ton of runs (7)
20 Creature able to wreck a ship (5)
21 Quickest to cause endless strife? (5)
23 Take heart and sneer about this furtive fellow (7)
24 Steal fruitfully (6)
25 When a car crashes, it's bent (3)
27 With sulphur and charcoal, can be explosive! (5)
28 Calms notedly rough seas (5)
30 Pay the right overtime! (5)
32 Soon to be nameless (4)
33 One word in three from a candidate (3)

ACROSS
3 Ending in death (5)
8 Belief (5)
10 Girl's name (5)
11 Pen part (3)
12 Closes (5)
13 Equilibrium (7)
15 Happen again (5)
18 Hill (3)
19 Capital of Zimbabwe (6)
21 Harass, torment (7)
22 Produces eggs (4)
23 Rip (4)
24 Stifle (7)
26 Subsides (6)
29 Not at home (3)
31 Weary (5)
32 Craftsman (7)
34 Friendly, informally (5)
35 Pistachio, for example (3)
36 Confess (5)
37 Surcoat (5)
38 Warehouse (5)

DOWN
1 Of punishment (5)
2 Formal discussions (7)
4 Dull pain (4)
5 Of the stars (6)
6 Intense beam of light (5)
7 Distinctive smell (5)
9 Nothing (3)
12 Shrieks, shrill cries (7)
14 Signal agreement (3)
16 Provide food (5)
17 Prepared (5)
19 School subject (7)
20 Baa (5)
21 Out and away (2,3)
23 Entourage (7)
24 Demure (6)
25 Cabin (3)
27 Feathered friends (5)
28 Lukewarm (5)
30 Dead language (5)
32 Too (4)
33 Star (3)

SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD 2674

ACROSS: 1 Weather, 5 Stadium, 9 Respect, 10 Brigand, 11 Thorn, 12 On the line, 13 Deduction, 15 Chess, 16 Fancy, 18 Lie in wait, 21 Run across, 24 Noble, 25 Sell-out, 26 Erratic, 27 Western, 28 Remorse.

DOWN: 1 Worsted, 2 Abscond, 3 Hue and cry, 4 Ratio, 5 Substance, 6 Abide, 7 Imagine, 8 Madness, 14 Ill-gotten, 15 Conundrum, 16 Foresaw, 17 Nonplus, 19 Arbiter, 20 Treacle, 22 Chore, 23 Sheer.

◆SU-DO-KU-6872◆

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9						1		6
		5			6			
		9		7			4	
4			6		5			1
	5			8		9		
			3			8		
1		3						7
2	9		7			3		

hard

SOLUTION TO 6871

5	6	2	4	9	7	3	8	1
8	3	7	6	1	5	4	2	9
9	4	1	8	3	2	7	6	5
6	2	8	5	7	4	1	9	3
1	7	9	2	8	3	5	4	6
4	5	3	9	6	1	8	7	2
3	8	6	1	4	9	2	5	7
2	1	4	7	5	6	9	3	8
7	9	5	3	2	8	6	1	4

To solve the puzzle: To solve a su-do-ku puzzle, every digit from1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows, and in each of the nine boxes.

SCRABBLE™

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A1	E1	T1	S1	D2	W4	R1	4th Letter Triple	RACK 1
N1	E1	R1	E1	W4	O1	D2	Triple Word Score	RACK 2
I1	I1	H4	R1	T1	I1	W4	2nd Letter Triple	RACK 3
Y4	B3	B3	G2	G2	A1	A1		RACK 4

PAR SCORE 120-130
by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL
TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

DIRECTIONS: Make a 2- to 7-letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right. 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words are in the Collins English Dictionary. JUDD'S SOLUTION TOMORROW

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

Z10	A1	X8	E1	S1		
S1	C3	A1	L1	L1	O1	P3
C3	A1	S1	C3	A1	D2	E1
E1	N1	T1	R1	Y4		

PAR SCORE 120-130

RACK 1 = 41
RACK 2 = 61
RACK 3 = 68
RACK 4 = 16
JUDD'S TOTAL 186

JUMBLE®

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

ENUQE
MWPSA
TNYOKT
OITTPE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: NIFTY PROUD SEESAW BURGER
Answer: When he tried out the barbecue grill his wife got him, he was — FIRED UP

HITORI-3326

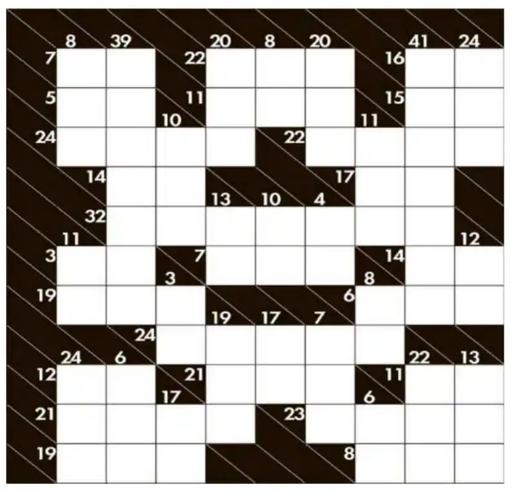
3	5	1	7	8	4	1	6
8	7	3	2	2	7	1	1
7	4	7	1	2	7	8	7
5	2	7	7	1	2	6	3
6	2	5	3	4	8	7	7
4	2	2	7	6	5	7	1
7	8	4	6	7	1	3	2
1	3	7	5	7	2	2	7

SOLUTION TO 3325

■	2	7	1	■	8	5	3
3	■	6	■	7	4	1	8
5	4	8	6	2	■	7	■
4	■	2	8	■	5	6	7
■	1	■	5	4	■	2	6
8	5	3	2	6	1	■	4
2	8	5	■	3	■	4	■
6	■	4	7	5	3	8	1

To solve the puzzle: Eliminate numbers by filling in squares so that remaining cells in that row or column do not repeat that number more than once. Filled-in cells cannot be horizontally or vertically adjacent. The un-filled cells must form a single component connected horizontally and vertically.

KAKURO- 3326



SOLUTION TO 3325

To solve the puzzle: Put a number from 1 through 9 in a cell. No zeros. A number in a cell separated by diagonal line tells the sum of numbers in consecutive cells at its right or downward. No number may appear more than once in consecutive cells.

SU DO KU X - 3877

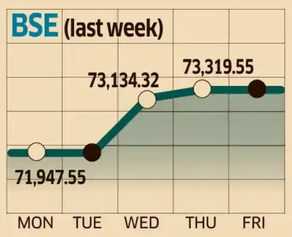
4								■
	■	3					■	
		■	8			■	5	7
			■		■			
	2			7				
8			■		■		1	4
5		■	7		6	■		
1	■		4	3		5	■	
3	6	4	2		8			■

SOLUTION TO 3876

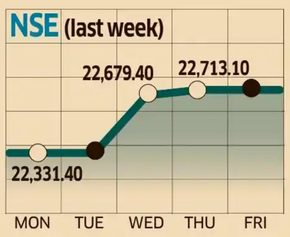
9	6	1	3	8	4	2	7	5
3	4	8	2	5	7	9	6	1
7	2	5	1	9	6	3	4	8
2	8	7	6	3	9	5	1	4
1	9	4	5	7	8	6	2	3
6	5	3	4	2	1	7	8	9
4	7	2	9	1	3	8	5	6
5	1	9	8	6	2	4	3	7
8	3	6	7	4	5	1	9	2

To solve the puzzle: The objective is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column, each 3x3 box and each shaded diagonal line contains the same number only once.

BSE (last week)



NSE (last week)



*Data as of Apr 3 *Markets were closed on Mar 31 for Mahavir Jayanti & Apr 3 for Good Friday

TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
TRENT	4.52%	SUNPHARMA	-5.62%
BEL	4.14%	NTPC	-4.23%
TECHM	3.63%	ULTRACEMCO	-3.85%
ADANI PORTS	2.97%	BAJAJFINSV	-3.18%
TITAN	2.92%	BHARTIARTL	-2.86%

TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
HINDALCO INDS	5.72%	HDFC LIFE INS	-7.23%
TRENT	4.44%	SUN PHARMA	-5.58%
BEL	4.16%	DR REDDY'S	-5.02%
TECHM	3.59%	NTPC	-4.26%
ADANI PORTS	2.98%	CIPLA	-4.02%

Sensex (52-week)

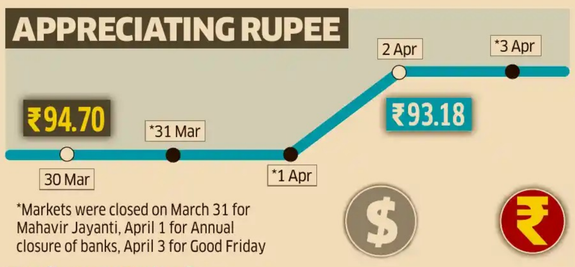
Apr 3, 2025: 76,295.36 | Apr 2, 2026: 73,319.55 | -3.90%

Nifty (52-week)

Apr 3, 2025: 23,250.10 | Apr 2, 2026: 22,713.10 | -2.31%

10-year Bond yield 7.12%

APPRECIATING RUPEE



*Markets were closed on March 31 for Mahavir Jayanti, April 1 for Annual closure of banks, April 3 for Good Friday

Exchange Rates*

Dollar	₹ 93.18	SGD	₹ 72.17
Pound	₹ 123.18	Yen (100 units)	₹ 58.49
Euro	₹ 107.48		

*Price at which banks sell

Crude Oil Rate ($ per barrel)

BRENT CRUDE $109.03* 7.78%

*Rate as of Apr 4

Bengaluru fuel pump price*

(Retail)

Petrol* ₹102.55 ₹-0.37%

Diesel* ₹90.65 ₹-0.34%

*Rates as of Apr 4 #Rate change compared with yesterday

Commodity watch

COFFEE

Category	Rate (Rs per 50 kg)*
Arabica Parchment	₹ 22800 - 23300
Arabica Cherry	₹ 12900 - 14700
Robusta Parchment	₹ 17700 - 18000
Robusta Cherry	₹ 9500 - 10400

*Rates as on Apr 1

Other Commodities

Silkworm cocoon (Rs per kg)*

Bivoltine (BV)	₹ 702
Cross Breed (CB)	₹ 699

*Average rates as on Apr 3

Q4 FY26 IT RESULTS PREVIEW

War risks keep numbers flat, outlook uncertain: Analysts

West Asia crisis introduces additional layer of uncertainty for IT services firms

UMA KANNAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

The current geopolitical environment and ongoing West Asia crisis will impact Indian IT services firms both in terms of deal wins and revenues. Though analysts said there would not be major disruptions from the ongoing war on numbers, deal wins might be impacted in the short-term and that client spending on large deals amid war escalation risks temper near-term revenue traction.

The country's largest IT services firm, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), will begin Q4FY26 earnings season on April 9, followed by Wipro on April 16. HCLTech and Infosys will announce their Q4FY26 results on April 21 and April 23, respectively.

HDFC Securities said it would be another muted March quarter for the IT services sector, with Tier-1 players' growth projected at -1.1 to +0.9% QoQ cc, and mid-tier companies ranging growth from -1.8% to +3.4%. However, the rupee depreciation will bring some respite to margins, but AI-led deflation concerns triggered the recent multiple de-rating.

"Launch of new models from GenAI platforms like Claude and Palantir fuelled a 24% correction over the past three months on fears of disrupting traditional SaaS/IT models. Indian IT services companies note that deploying new GenAI models will prove difficult in complex regulatory brownfield environments. However, the expected 6-7% deflation impact (up from 4%) will be offset by net-new AI-centric deals in a $300-400 billion opportunity pool, though this will temper the recovery pace," HDFC Securities said.

It said the sector growth recovery is now hinging on pure execution capability as new deals are mostly outcome-driven, pricing is agent-augmented and renewals come at discounts.

JM Financial noted that following the third quarter earnings season, investors turned positive, but it declined subsequently due to concerns around the potential impact of GenAI leading to underperformance of 15% in February and March.

On top of this, war has introduced an additional layer of uncertainty for IT services firms. It said INR depreciation is the only relief for Indian IT and it is likely to support margins in the near-term.

Last Thursday, the rupee appreciated 1.40% to 93.15, as it recovered after extreme weakness at 95.21. JM Financial expects Infosys' FY27 guidance to be 2% to 4% while HCLTech (IT Services) could guide for 4% to 6% based on its 4Q expectation.

For the fourth quarter of FY26, the brokerage firm expects cc IT Services revenue growth of -0.7% to 7.4% YoY (-1.8% to 1.6% QoQ) for the top six companies, given lower working days. For the mid-tier Indian IT firms, it estimates cc revenue growth of 3% to 22% YoY (-0.3% to 3.6% cc QoQ), led by Persistent.

The brokerage firm expects Wipro to guide for -1.5% to +0.5% QoQ cc revenue growth in Q1 largely due to delay in deals getting ramped up. It expects HCLTech to guide for 4% to 6% YoY revenue growth for IT services in FY27 (3% to 5% for the overall business).

Motilal Oswal Financial Services expects margins to be range-bound for TCS and Infosys. "We expect a margin contraction for Wipro (Harman DTS dilution, wage hikes, slower growth) and HCLTech (wage hikes, restructuring headwinds and P&P decline)," it said.

Cross-currency impact for top six players

	Revenue share (%)				Change (QoQ) (%)			
Company	USD	GBP	EUR	AUD	USD	GBP	EUR	AUD
TCS	49	15	12	4	2.5	1.2	0.2	5.5
INFO	63	5	18	4	3.3	1.7	0.8	6.8
HCL	56	9	19	13	3.3	1.7	0.8	6.8
TECHM	52	9	14	5	2.5	1.2	0.2	5.5
Wipro	61	11	9	4	3.3	1.7	0.8	6.8
LTIM	77	3	8	0	2.5	1.2	0.2	-

Source: JM Financial

Among mid-caps, Hexaware and LTTS may see about 40bp/60bp pressure due to ramp-ups, seasonality, and wage hikes. The brokerage firm said the fourth quarter is likely uneventful, but AI deflation and war risks keep the outlook uncertain.

Motilal Oswal said if the war persists, demand is likely to be affected, whereas AI deflation is more a question of what AI will be capable of in the next 2-5 years, rather than the last quarter.

As far as verticals' performance in Q4, BFSI remains relatively resilient. Motilal Oswal said manufacturing is mixed — Auto OEMs are adjusting to tariff risks, but spends remain elusive. HiTech is broadly flat, travel & transportation is likely to be impacted by war-related concerns, with some engagements facing delays.

Among large caps, Motilal Oswal said it prefers HCLTech and Tech Mahindra. "We like HCLT as the company remains the fastest-growing large-cap IT services firm, and we like its all-weather portfolio, which continues to outperform in an uncertain demand environment. For TECHM, we see signs of transformation under the new leadership and improving execution in BFSI. We believe TECHM's transformation remains relatively decoupled from discretionary spending," it said. The brokerage firm expects TCS and Infosys' EBIT margins to be range bound in the fourth quarter.

OMCs to pay discounted rates to refiners amid fuel price freeze

NEW DELHI, PTI: In a first since fuel price deregulation, Indian state-run oil marketing companies (OMCs) will pay refineries a discounted price for petrol, diesel, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) and kerosene to limit mounting losses from a self-imposed freeze on retail fuel prices, sources said.

The OMCs on March 26 fixed rates for petroleum products that are at a discount of up to Rs 60 per litre to their imported cost, two people with direct knowledge of the matter said. The discounted rates, which are applicable with effect from March 16, will hit standalone refiners such as MRPL, CPCL and HMEL the most.

International oil prices have risen from about $70 per barrel before the West Asia conflict to over $100, but retail petrol and diesel prices in India have remained unchanged, forcing OMCs to absorb the impact.

With no immediate end to the conflict in sight, OMCs have decided to fix a discount on the refinery transfer price (RTP) — the internal price at which refineries sell fuel to marketing arms — to effectively pay refineries less than the import-parity cost of the fuels like petrol and diesel.

For the second half of March, a discount of Rs 22,342 per kl was fixed on diesel to bring down the RTP of Rs 85,349 per kl to Rs 63,007 per kl.

For the first fortnight of April, the discount on diesel has been fixed at Rs 60,239 per kl to lower RTP from Rs 1,46,243 per kl to Rs 86,004 per kl.

On ATF, the RTP has been slashed to Rs 76,923 per kl from Rs 1,27,486 per kl after considering a discount of Rs 50,564 per kl.

The RTP for kerosene after a discount of Rs 46,311 per kl has been fixed at Rs 77,534 per kl from Rs 123,845 per kl, they said.

Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum Corp and Hindustan Petroleum Corp did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The discounted pricing would prevent refiners from fully passing on higher crude costs through RTP, forcing them to absorb part of the impact of elevated global oil prices.

Gold imports up 29% in Apr-Feb 2025-26

NEW DELHI, PTI: The country's gold imports rose 28.73% to $69 billion during April-February 2025-26 on account of high prices of the precious metal, according to the Commerce Ministry data.

Gold imports stood at $53.52 billion in April-February 2024-25.

The rise in gold imports pushed the country's trade deficit to $310.60 billion during the 11-months of the last fiscal, compared to $261.80 billion during April-February 2024-25, the data showed.

Prices of the yellow metal are hovering at around Rs 1,51,500 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) in the national capital.

DH INTERVIEW

'Economic power centres expected to become widely dispersed due to West Asia conflict'

The West Asia conflict will lead to a significant rebalancing in the global economy and financial market. Dubai's position as a safe destination has been badly hit. India, being a relatively safer country with a large market, labour force and technological progress, may benefit from the shift of capital from the Gulf region, IIM Kozhikode Director **Debashis Chatterjee** tells *DH*'s **Gyanendra Keshri** in a candid interview. *Edited excerpts:*

What will be the long-term impact of the West Asia conflict?

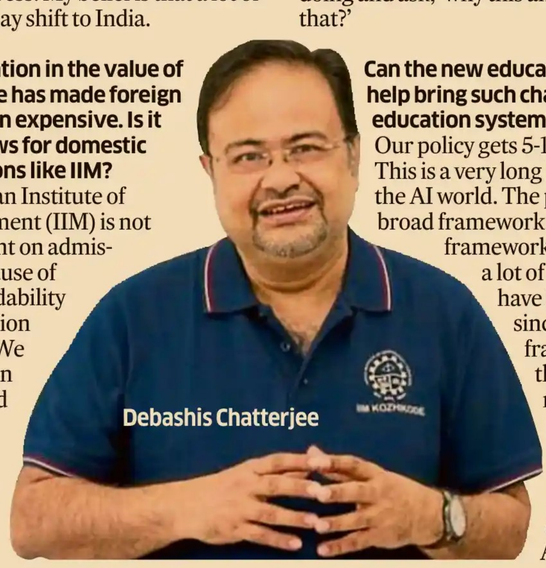
The war has to stop, whether it will be in a few days or few weeks or months. But it is going to have a long-term impact, as we witnessed during the previous crises like the World Wars and the Covid pandemic. After World War II, we saw the birth of the United Nations and the other UN bodies. Coalitions were created to prevent the next war. The economies of Japan and other nations affected by the war started regenerating. So you could see the generative effect of the war, not just the destructive effect. After Covid, we saw the birth of technology that could break distances without human contact. The present crisis will have a generative impact too. The economic power centres are expected to become widely dispersed.

How will it impact India?

The global financial activities have been concentrated in a few cities like Dubai, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Now people see what is happening in Dubai. Given China's tension, people are getting apprehensive about Hong Kong too. Now, people will try to hedge against the risk of concentrating economic activity in potential war zones. In this realignment, India may gain. If not Dubai, where will the money go? For ideological reasons, a lot of people may not opt for China. India is a relatively safer country with a large market, labour force and technological progress. My belief is that a lot of capital may shift to India.

Depreciation in the value of the rupee has made foreign education expensive. Is it good news for domestic institutions like IIM?

The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) is not dependent on admission because of the affordability of education outside. We depend on our brand and equity. During war and calamities,



one sector which does not necessarily decline is education. If some people are out of a job, they might spend more on education to upgrade themselves. The depreciation in rupee will definitely impact people's budget, but this can't be the only reason to decide on foreign education.

The IT sector has witnessed significant layoffs, probably due to AI. How do you see the situation in the coming years?

There have been layoffs. We heard about massive numbers from Oracle. People have to be ready. You have to skill and re-skill. The situation does not improve. It is what it is. We have to improve. In all changes, some professions get hit, but they re-emerge in another dimension. This is happening in the case of AI too. Routine, repetitive jobs are being taken over by machines. Now the non-repetitive non-routine aspects of life will gather much greater attraction. You have to go through technology to know what it cannot do and you prepare yourself for it. People are talking about Generative AI. Who generates AI? Is AI generating it or are humans generating it? As long as humans have that generative capacity, it will remain relevant.

Is our education system in tune with the changing requirement?

The education of today is a reactive mechanism. It reacts to what happens out there. It is hardly creative or proactive. It does not create education for the future. Education is always for the past. So what was needed for the past, we continue to do. Hence, we are beautifully prepared for a world that no longer exists. We have to teach for the future, which means you have to unleash human capabilities. Faculty must move from being experts to thinkers. Experts do more and more of the same thing over and over again. Thinkers reflect on what they are doing and ask, 'why this and why not that?'

Can the new education policy help bring such changes in the education system?

Our policy gets 5-10 years. This is a very long horizon in the AI world. The policy is a broad framework. It is a good framework. However, a lot of changes have happened since it was framed. So the policy needs to be revised in line with such changes, especially AI.

DH REVIEW

Apple iPhone 17e: An incremental upgrade

ROHIT K V N
BENGALURU, DHNS

In mid-March, Apple's most-affordable A19-powered handset, the iPhone 17e, hit stores in India.

The device is available in two storage options — 256GB and 512GB — for Rs 64,900 and Rs 84,900, respectively.

Design, build quality and display

The iPhone 17e retains the design elements of its predecessor. It comes in a lightweight compact form factor featuring the same aerospace-grade aluminium-based flat mid-frame with curved corners. It has a single camera sensor with an LED flash on the back.

On the front, the display has a thick, uniform bezel around the edges and the trademark notch at the top, which houses the FaceID sensor and the 12MP FaceTime camera.

It also features an IP68 water and dust-resistant rating, and Ceramic Shield 2 on the display.

In addition to standard black and white variants, it comes in a soft pink colour option as well.

The iPhone 17e features an action button at the top of the volume rockers on the left side, which can be programmed to launch the user's favourite apps such as Shazam, switch between silent or ring modes, turn on/off the torch, summon Siri, translate languages, and more.

It comes with a single physical SIM slot and a wake button on the right side.

The iPhone 17e sports a 6.1-inch Super Retina XDR OLED display, with up to 1,200 nits peak HDR brightness and 60Hz refresh rate. It is good enough for consuming multimedia content on OTT and watching videos on social media platforms indoors.

The FaceID sensor is very efficient in quickly recognising faces and unlocking the screen, with a very low false rejection rate.

SPEC SHEET

Display & Design: 6.1-inch Super Retina XDR OLED, 60Hz, IP68 water/dust resistance, Ceramic Shield 2

Camera: 48MP rear Fusion camera (default 24MP), 2x optical zoom, 12MP front TrueDepth, both support 4K Dolby Vision video

Price: Rs 64,900 (256GB) | Rs 84,900 (512GB)

Performance: A19 chipset, 16-core NPU, supports AI apps, hardware-accelerated ray tracing, iOS 26, MagSafe & 15W wireless charging, 20W fast charge in 75 mins

Performance

The device is powered by the Apple A19 chipset with a 6-core CPU, 4-core GPU with Neural Accelerators, and 16-core NPU. It is fast and works smoothly.

It supports all popular Generative AI apps in addition to Apple Intelligence features. With hardware-accelerated ray tracing capability, the iPhone 17e delivers an immersive gaming experience.

The device runs iOS 26 and comes with several value-added features, including Call Screening, Live Translation in Messages, FaceTime, Phone, and AirPods.

Under normal usage with mixed use of Wi-Fi and cellular internet, the iPhone 17e can last an entire day.

With a 20W charger, it can go from zero to 100% in under 75 minutes. Also, the iPhone 17e supports MagSafe and Qi2 15W fast wireless charging.

Another big upgrade we see in the iPhone 17e is the Apple C1X cellular modem. It is up to 2x faster than C1 in iPhone 16e and matches the speed of iPhone Air. Also, C1X uses 30% less energy than the modem in the iPhone 16 Pro, to deliver long all-day battery life.

Photography

The iPhone 17e features a new 48MP Fusion camera. By default, it can capture 24MP resolution with good detail. Users can bump up the resolution to 48MP for sharper photos.

If one is dissatisfied with the focus or the depth in a portrait mode photo, users can still adjust the focal length in the Photos app to turn images into more beautiful portraits with background blur.

In night mode, the photo quality is decent. It also supports 2x lossless optical zoom.

On the front, it features a 12MP TrueDepth camera, which takes nice portrait selfies in sunlight.

Both the back and front cameras support 4K Dolby Vision video recording up to 60 fps.

Final thoughts

The Apple iPhone 17e boasts significant enhancements over its predecessor. It features quicker MagSafe wireless charging, an entirely new Apple C1X cellular modem, and the A19 silicon ensures the device functions with exceptional smoothness. However, considering the price tag, the presence of just a single camera kind of diminishes its overall allure.

Financial preparedness is no longer optional, it is essential

2026 has not started well. First came the AI driven layoffs. The technology sector alone reported 40,000-60,000 layoffs, with projections suggesting this could rise up to ninefold by year-end. If the AI driven layoffs were not enough, the geopolitical tensions have led to pretty much all asset classes crashing. All in all, it is a time of uncertainty on all fronts.

While markets will eventually recover, the wave of layoffs signal of a deeper structural shift in the nature of income security. Traditionally, individuals relied heavily on stable monthly income as the foundation for their financial lives. However, in a world where even high-skilled roles are vulnerable, this approach is increasingly fragile. Thus, the need to move from income dependency to financial resilience.

Financial planning must now focus on building bigger buffers that can sustain periods of uncertainty. While earlier advice suggested maintaining six to nine months of expenses, having nine to twelve months of expenses set aside can provide the cushion needed to navigate job transitions or unexpected disruptions without financial stress.

The start of the financial year is a good time to review the investment portfolio. Given that most investments are chosen based on their recent performance, it is important to now focus on one's financial goals and attach existing investments to these goals. So if silver ETF was invested into last year, one needs to assess how long they can hold this investment and accordingly tag it to the relevant goal.

It is paramount to stay invested as per goals, even if investments are giving negative returns. Investment performance needs to be evaluated on a relative basis and on standalone basis. Impulsive exit decisions in investments during geopolitical tensions may feel like a safe move, but often lead to locking in losses and missing eventual recoveries. This is because many of the best days in the markets happen after the worst days. Also, a 10-20% fall intra year fall in Sensex, is normal, but 75% of the time markets have ended positive.

MRIN AGARWAL
FINANCIAL EDUCATOR & FOUNDER FINSAFE INDIA PVT LTD

One must separate short-term concerns from long-term goals. A well-defined liquidity strategy like allocating to relatively stable instruments such as debt funds to cover expenses for the next three to five years, can help shield the portfolio from geopolitical and market volatility while supporting ongoing lifestyle needs. This buffer also helps reframe market fluctuations. When individuals know they have sufficient reserves to ride out downturns without being forced to sell during a potential bear phase, they are more likely to stay invested and maintain an appropriate allocation to growth-oriented assets, enabling them to benefit during subsequent market recoveries.

Reducing dependency on a single income has become necessary for financial resilience. Single income earners face a disproportionate financial and emotional burden, as the entire household depends on one source of income. The fear of income loss often leads to conservative decision-making or reluctance to take calculated risks. Over time, this will impact one's financial progress.

The importance of mindful spending has become even more important now. Periods of high income should typically translate into higher expenses. Reviewing household expenses through a conscious evaluation of spending habits, separating necessities from non-essential outflows and making thoughtful adjustments where possible, can significantly enhance one's ability to navigate income uncertainties with confidence.

Together, these elements build financial agility, allowing one to adapt confidently to change rather than react under pressure. The layoffs of 2026 are a reminder that financial stability is not about how much one earns, but how well one prepares. The time to act is now.

TOP PICKS

The data is sourced from Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited

Syrma SGS (ID: SYRMA) — BUY
Upside +26%** | Last close ₹796 | Target: ₹1,000*

JSW Steel (ID: JSWSTEEL) — BUY
Upside +23%** | Last close ₹1,135 | Target: ₹1,400*

Marico (ID: MARICO) — BUY
Upside +15%** | Last close ₹761 | Target: ₹875*

Jain Resource Recycling (ID: JAINREC) — BUY
Upside +12%** | Last close ₹463 | Target: ₹520*

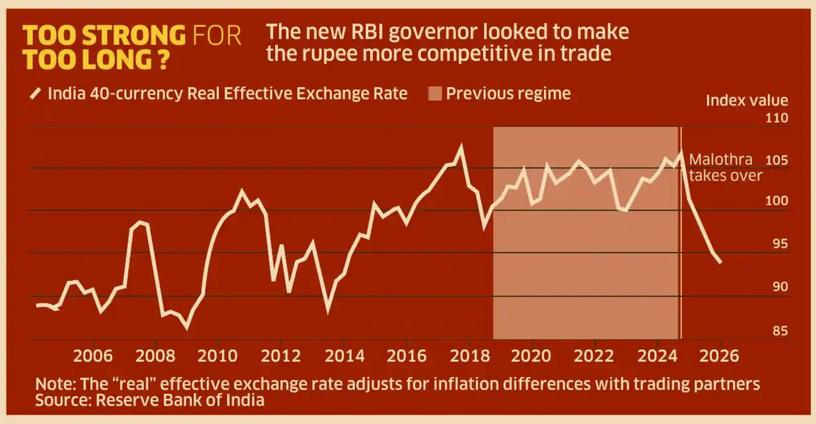
TVS Motors (ID: TVSMOTOR) — BUY
Upside +32%** | Last close ₹3,391 | Target: ₹4,461*

* Target price has been calculated on the basis of fundamentals ** Upside refers to more value stock is expected to generate than its current price

Rupee at 100 could test India's ambitions

For middle class, it could translate into higher cost of living

ANDY MUKHERJEE
BLOOMBERG OPINION



Long before the first missiles were fired in the Middle East, the warning signs of a 2013-style capital exodus were visible in the gap between India's ambitions and economic resources. Once the Iran war revived the dollar's safe-haven appeal, the bottom gave way under the rupee.

Asia's worst-performing currency over the past year weakened through a key psychological barrier of 95 against the greenback to hit a record intraday low of 95.12 on Monday. The conflict in the Persian Gulf is the trigger for the unusual weakness, but the fragility is domestic.

Traders rightly sensed the Reserve Bank of India's mandate to cap local banks' end-of-day currency positions at $100 million as a desperate measure. Announced late last Friday, the restriction was widely expected to knock off one-way bets against the rupee. But it backfired. The market is no longer confident that the RBI will be able to stop the rupee from slipping past 100. After all, when a monetary authority restricts how lenders manage their books, it unwittingly ends up signaling that traditional tools like interest-rate hikes or dollar sales are no longer sufficient. That's when speculators swoop in.

In a globally-integrated financial system, a central bank faces a choice: It can either defend the exchange rate or control domestic interest rates. It cannot do both. For too long, the RBI tried to skirt this reality. Governor Sanjay Malhotra inherited a rupee that had become overvalued under his predecessor's strategy of squeezing out exchange-rate volatility to anchor inflation. After taking charge in late 2024, the new chief slashed interest rates to revive investment — effectively taking his foot off the other stool. He let the rupee weaken to insulate the economy from the Trump administration's tariff chokehold on exports.

The gamble worked for a while, but when the oil shock hit, it became untenable. To save the currency now, the monetary authority might have to raise borrowing costs, thereby stifling growth. To save growth, it must let the rupee go. Neither option is appealing.

For the middle class, a triple-digit rupee translates into a higher cost of living. The domestic Indian consumer lacks the financial cushion to withstand global energy spikes, which cannot be absorbed by the state without losing its barely investment-grade credit rating. With Brent crude four-fifths more expensive than earlier this year, a weaker currency acts as a double tax by amplifying the rupee-denominated price of imported fuel. This pressure migrates from the pump to the food-supply chain as transport, cooking-gas, and fertiliser costs rise in tandem.

The impact extends to aspirational spending. India is the leading source of international students in the US. An 8% depreciation in a single year can render a multi-year degree unaffordable for families, who have already stretched their finances and taken out education loans.

The Union Government will have to borrow heavily to maintain subsidies on fertiliser and cooking gas to prevent rural unrest. This fiscal strain is showing up in the secondary market, where the yield on the 10-year benchmark sovereign bond climbed to a near-two-year high of 7.1% Thursday. None of this augurs well for funding India's 2026-27 infrastructure pipeline.

The pressure is more acute at the regional level. Investors are balking at Indian states' high debt-to-GDP ratios and cash-for-votes programmes that create no long-term assets. Constraints on public funding push private borrowers out — even companies without foreign debt face higher borrowing costs, stymying capital expenditure.

On the eve of the 2013 taper tantrum, India ran loose monetary and fiscal policies in the face of high inflation. The market forced a correction by pummeling the rupee. Back then, households weren't happy with low real returns on bank deposits. This time around, there has been little price pressure, at least under Malhotra's supervision, but savers have been busy chasing yields in a red-hot market for IPOs. Then, when precious metals surged last year, the love for gold kicked in — just like in 2013. The banking system's liquidity shortage worsened.

Global investors judge markets on dollar-denominated returns. If the local currency loses 10% of its value, equity gains vanish. The record $12 billion outflow from Indian stocks in March indicates the exit sign is currently more attractive than the growth story. As capital leaves, the rupee weakens further.

The most acute pain is felt by the working poor. They rely on labour-intensive sectors like textiles and diamond polishing, which have seen margins collapse under 50% US tariffs, energy shortages, and waning global demand. What's more, the safety net of remittances from family members overseas is fraying as the Iran conflict threatens jobs in the Gulf. Without this inflow, overleveraged rural households will be further in debt to meet basic needs.

After Monday's debacle, the RBI managed to engineer the biggest rally in the rupee in 12 years on Thursday by doubling down on currency controls. Such administrative measures could delay the slide, but they may not steady the rupee at 93. As the exchange rate nears 100, the focus must shift from defending a number to managing the social and economic consequences of a weaker currency.

Moody's cuts India's FY27 GDP growth forecast to 6%

NEW DELHI, PTI: Moody's Ratings has slashed India's economic growth estimates for the current fiscal to 6%, from 6.8% earlier, saying the conflict in West Asia will moderate growth momentum and raise inflation risks.

In its credit opinion report on India, Moody's said prolonged disruptions, particularly LPG shipments due to the conflict, would lead to near-term household shortages, higher fuel and transport costs, and spillovers to food inflation through India's reliance on imported fertilisers.

The region accounts for around 55% of crude oil imports and over 90% of LPG supplies to India.

"While inflation remains contained for now, geopolitical risks have tilted the inflation outlook to the upside," Moody's said, while projecting inflation to average 4.8% in FY27, up from 2.4% in FY26.

With inflation risks re-emerging and growth remaining robust, policy rates are likely to be held steady or raised gradually in fiscal 2026–27, depending on the duration of geopolitical tensions and their pass-through to food and fuel prices, Moody's said in its report.

OPEC+ hikes oil production quotas, warns about damage to energy infra

VIENNA, AFP: OPEC+ agreed on Sunday to again increase oil production quotas, while warning that repairing energy facilities, such as those damaged in West Asia war, is "costly and takes a long time".

For a second month, OPEC+ countries, which include key oil producers Russia and Saudi Arabia, as well as other Gulf states that have been targets of Iranian airstrikes, agreed to raise quotas by 206,000 bpd from May. But OPEC+ warned that damage to energy infrastructure increases oil market volatility, potentially hitting global supplies well into the future.

Its statement also stressed "the critical importance of safeguarding international maritime routes to ensure the uninterrupted flow of energy".

The text did not mention the war directly, but the latter weighed on the decision.

WEEK AHEAD

Equities likely to remain volatile this week

External uncertainty and onset of a potentially mixed earnings season could keep volatility elevated

Key events this week
- MPC meeting from April 6-8
- TCS Q4 results on April 9

SIDDHARTHA KHEMKA

Indian equities are likely to remain volatile this week, with investor sentiment closely tied to evolving developments in the ongoing West Asia conflict. While the US continues to assess its response to potential actions on Iran's energy infrastructure, recent comments from US President Donald Trump indicate a more assertive stance—warning of possible military action if negotiations fail, while still leaving room for diplomacy.

Continued escalation, however, is keeping global risk appetite fragile. Reflecting this uncertainty, Brent crude prices have remained elevated (near ₹$107 per barrel), sustaining concerns around imported inflation. Currency pressures have also intensified, with the Indian rupee weakening sharply towards record-low levels against the US dollar before recovering towards ₹Rs 93, aided by active RBI intervention. The central bank has reportedly intervened through both spot dollar sales and forward market operations, helping smooth volatility and prevent disorderly depreciation. Foreign institutional investor (FII) selling remains another key overhang, as March month saw intense selling of Rs 1.2 lakh crore - marking one of the highest monthly outflows in the last several years.

Against this backdrop, global macro indicators will be closely tracked. Investors will monitor US FOMC meeting minutes, GDP data, initial jobless claims and CPI prints for cues on growth and the policy trajectory. Domestically, the RBI's upcoming rate decision assumes added significance, particularly in the context of elevated crude prices and imported inflation risks. While growth remains resilient, the central bank may retain a cautious stance, balancing inflation risks with liquidity conditions.

Importantly, the onset of the Q4 earnings season is likely to add another layer of volatility. The March quarter was impacted by currency depreciation, elevated input costs (particularly crude-linked) and uneven global demand, which could lead to divergent sectoral performance and stock-specific reactions. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is scheduled to report on April 9, setting the tone for the IT sector and broader earnings season.

Markets ended last week on a subdued note, with the Nifty50 declining 0.5%. Broader market performance was mixed, with the Nifty Midcap100 falling 0.8% while the Nifty Smallcap100 gained 0.2%, indicating selective risk appetite. Sectoral performance remained mixed, with IT (+2.6%) emerging as the top gainer, followed by metals (+1%), while PSU stocks (-5.2%) and consumer durables and financial services (-4.1%) lagged.

At a sectoral level, elevated crude prices continue to have a cascading impact on the oil & gas ecosystem. Recent policy measures—including excise duty cuts on auto fuels and export levies on refined products - offer partial support to oil marketing companies, although under-recoveries remain sensitive to crude movements. The waiver of duties on petrochemical feedstocks is a key positive for sectors such as paints, chemicals, packaging and select consumer industries, where input costs are closely linked to crude derivatives. This provides a meaningful margin cushion for downstream players, partially offsetting broader cost pressures. Geopolitical tensions are also reflecting in the defence sector, where rising security concerns have accelerated policy action. The Defence Acquisition Council's approval of proposals worth ₹Rs 2.4 lakh crore underscores the government's continued push to strengthen domestic capabilities. Alongside this, defence exports have reached record highs, reflecting improving global competitiveness.

In contrast, the IT sector continues to navigate a moderating demand environment, although recent buying interest suggests improving comfort on valuations. Q4FY26 earnings are expected to remain stable, with large-cap companies likely to report revenue growth in the range of -1% to +1.5% QoQ (constant currency), while mid-tier players continue to outperform. Margins are expected to remain range-bound, supported by currency tailwinds but offset by wage hikes and productivity pressures. Overall, markets are expected to remain volatile as geopolitical developments, crude price movements, FII flows and global macro data continue to drive sentiment.

(The writer is Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited)

DH INTERVIEW

'Our focus is on solving the unpredictability associated with bus travel'

AbhiBus, a key player in India's online bus ticketing ecosystem, has steadily evolved from a backend technology provider to a consumer-facing platform with nationwide reach. With deep integrations across state transport undertakings and private operators, the company is now focusing on predictability, customer experience, and Tier-2 and Tier-3 expansion. AbhiBus COO **Rohit Sharma** said in an interview with *DH*'s **Hrithik Kiran Bagade** that the company's growth is being driven by technology, cross-platform synergies, and changing travel preferences.

Can you walk us through the journey of AbhiBus?

AbhiBus is a 17–18-year-old organisation that began as a software provider for state transport undertakings (STUs), starting with APSRTC around 2008-09, followed by TSRTC and others like UPSRTC and Himachal Roadways. We continue to power their passenger information systems, OPRS, and unified ticketing solutions, including POS integrations.

Just before the pandemic, we pivoted to the consumer ticketing business with AbhiBus.com and our app. Over time, we've emerged as a strong No. 2 player in the bus OTA market. Growth accelerated post the ixigo acquisition, driven by cross-sell opportunities and AI-led customer solutions.

How large is your business in terms of bookings and geography?

For an OTA like us, inventory is the foundation. Our approach has been simple: if a bus sells online, it should be available on AbhiBus. Today, we have about 17 SRTCs and nearly 99% of private operators — around 6,500-7,000 — on our platform. We sell tickets across every state in India and continue to grow strongly in regions where our market share was previously low.

What kind of travellers dominate your bookings?

Bus travel sees a healthy mix of users. Weekday and weekend demand is fairly balanced, indicating both work and leisure travel. Many professionals — teachers, bank employees, government staff — depend on buses for intercity commutes. About 40% of our users are young travellers, and we've seen strong growth in leisure and pilgrimage segments. Destinations like Prayagraj, Ayodhya, Tirupati, Madurai, Goa, Manali, and Puducherry have shown robust traction, particularly among families.

Beyond ticketing, what value-added services do you offer?

Our focus is on solving the unpredictability associated with bus travel. One of our flagship offerings is the "Abhi Assured" programme, which addresses four key issues: delays, poor bus condition, staff behaviour, and no-shows. If something goes wrong, customers can receive instant refunds, even mid-journey, based on GPS tracking and AI validation. Features like photo-based issue reporting and automated refunds have improved trust and repeat usage.

We've also invested in "Bus 360," which uses AI to predict bus assignments up to 10 days in advance, enabling features like 360-degree bus views, seat insights, and safety checks. The goal is to make bus travel as predictable as possible.

Can customers book leisure or packaged trips?

Yes, we offer integrated travel packages for select destinations. For instance, Tirupati packages combine bus tickets with darshan access, aligned with temple schedules. These are enabled through partnerships with operators who receive allocations, making it convenient for users to plan end-to-end journeys.

What trends are you seeing in intercity bus travel?

A major trend is the rise of Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets. These segments have been unlocked significantly through ixigo's ecosystem, especially from train users whose tickets remain waitlisted. We've also seen strong growth in sleeper buses, which are increasingly preferred as alternatives to AC train classes. Cross-selling from train bookings has been a key driver here.

Has there been a shift towards sleeper buses?

Yes, significantly. Pre-Covid, the ratio was roughly 70:30 in favour of seater buses. Today, that has flipped, especially for overnight routes, with sleepers accounting for about 70%. This shift began during the pandemic when privacy became important, and operators converted seater buses into sleeper coaches. Now, it's a comfort-driven choice, with travellers willing to pay a premium.

How does bus travel compare with flights and trains?

The biggest challenge has been predictability. Flights are highly structured, while buses have traditionally lacked consistency. We've addressed this through live tracking, better operator standards, and improved visibility into the journey experience. Buses also remain highly cost-effective, typically priced between Rs 1 and Rs 4 per km, and are ideal for last-minute travel since fares don't spike as sharply as flights.

How are you helping operators modernise?

Many operators are still traditional businesses, so we introduce them to technology-driven solutions. Features like the "pink seat" ensure safer travel for women by preventing adjacent bookings by male passengers. We also provide analytics on route adherence, fuel usage, and driving behaviour. These tools help operators improve efficiency and service quality.

West Asia conflict: Fuel surcharge on e-com deliveries; airlines hike baggage fees

Iran war sends gas, transport costs soaring in US

WASHINGTON, PTI

The war against Iran has started to impact Americans, with Amazon announcing a fuel surcharge for its e-commerce deliveries and some airlines hiking fees for checked-in baggage to offset higher fuel costs.

The average price of petrol in the US has increased to USD 4.09 a gallon on Friday, up more than one dollar from just before the war and the highest level since August 2022.

The cost of diesel has risen sharply from USD 3.64 per gallon a year ago to USD 5.53 per gallon on Friday, according to data maintained by the American Automobile Association (AAA). Diesel is widely used in farming, construction and transportation, besides other industries. E-commerce giant Amazon also said that, beginning April 17, it plans to add a 3.5 per cent fuel surcharge on third-party sellers.

The US Postal Service on Wednesday said it is seeking to impose a temporary 8 per cent fuel surcharge for package and express mail deliveries to deal with rising transportation costs.

If approved by the Postal Regulatory Commission, the surcharge would take effect April 26 and remain in place until January 17, 2027, the Postal Service said in a notice on its website.

If the war against Iran stretches longer, it will also lead to supply chain disruptions in the US.

"I don't think the US will avoid it. These are global markets," Rachel Ziemba, a New York-based analyst who advises corporations on geopolitical risk, was quoted by The Washington Post as saying.

"Experts, even a week ago, were worried. Now they are more worried," she said.

"If transportation costs start rising, it's going to bleed through in other prices," Austan Goolsbee, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, was quoted as saying by CBS.

"So I think it's in the near term, but not immediate, that you would start to see that weighing down of the consumer - they would just get sticker shock. People were already highly concerned about affordability and the cost of living, and this would just be piling onto it," he said.

Blocking the Hormuz Strait has already cost the global economy hundreds of millions of barrels of oil, with the effects felt on a rolling basis corresponding to travel time from the Persian Gulf, The Washington Post reported.

A taxi stands next to a banner depicting Iran's new supreme leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, along a street in Tehran on Sunday. Oman and Iran held talks on easing passage through the Strait of Hormuz. AFP

Air India suspends flights to Israel till May 31

JERUSALEM, PTI: Amid the ongoing war in West Asia, Air India has suspended its flights to Israel till May 31.

An Air India executive confirmed to PTI that the airline has suspended flights on the New Delhi-Tel Aviv route till May 31.

Most of the leading airlines have suspended their operations on the Tel Aviv route with only Israeli carriers like El Al, IsraAir, Arkia and Air Haifa operating under severe restrictions.

The suspension of flights has caused major worries among more than 40,000 Indians living in Israel who wish to travel to India for personal or professional reasons, or even to escape the escalating tensions in the region. Indians looking to leave Israel have to go through Jordan or Egypt by entering the two countries through the land crossings.

The Indian mission in Tel Aviv has been assisting those looking to travel through various means.

The embassy has also maintained regular contact with the community during the period, opening a 24x7 emergency line and also launching a massive registration drive.

Ambassador J P Singh and the embassy team on Saturday held virtual discussion with Indian workers and students across Israel to listen to their concerns, assuring them of "constant support during the ongoing crisis, and beyond", the mission said on its social media handle.

Dial back rhetoric: Critics to Trump after expletive-laden post on Tehran

WASHINGTON, PTI

On Easter Sunday morning, US President Donald Trump surprised both friends and detractors with a profane social media post warning Iran that it will be "living in Hell" if it did not open the Strait of Hormuz, drawing calls for dialling back the rhetoric.

"Open the F****n' Strait, you crazy bastards, or you'll be living in Hell – JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah," Trump said in a post on Truth Social, hours after the US armed forces carried out a daring operation to rescue a missing crew member of a fighter jet shot down inside Iran. Former Republican Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, who had a public falling out with Trump before she left Congress, said the president "has gone insane."

"On Easter morning, this is what President Trump posted," Greene said on X.

"Everyone in his administration that claims to be a Christian needs to fall on their knees and beg forgiveness from God and stop worshipping the President and intervene in Trump's madness," she added.

"This is the first war fought in this age of social media with this president. I think he does things very differently," Bill Stepien, former campaign manager of Trump, said on CNN.

Democratic Senator Tim Kaine termed the "rhetoric" from the Trump administration as "embarrassing and juvenile."

"I hope the White House-I doubt the president will-but please dial back the rhetoric because you don't need to put people like these pilots more at risk by the rhetoric that you use," Kaine, a member of the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees, told NBC News.

OPEC+ countries to increase output

Eight countries (Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria and Oman) from the OPEC+ oil cartel say they will increase production again in May to ensure stability on the oil market - a decision overshadowed by the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz to tanker traffic due to the Iran war, reports AP. The countries said in a statement carried Sunday on the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries website that production would be increased by 206,000 barrels per day.

Iran strategy will boost Israeli influence in the Gulf: UAE

Israeli influence in the Gulf will increase as a result of Iran's strategy in the region, UAE presidential advisor Anwar Gargash said on Sunday, as Tehran pressed an air campaign against its neighbours, reports AFP.
"The Iranian strategy will actually concretise the American role... It will not reduce it. We will also see Israeli influence become more prominent in the Gulf, not less," Gargash said, in remarks released to the media on Sunday.
Tha advisor also confirmed the UAE was ready to "join any American-led effort, international effort to secure navigation in the Strait of Hormuz".

Hamas armed wing rejects calls for its disarmament

REUTERS

Hamas' armed wing said on Sunday discussing the group's disarmament before Israel fully implements the first phase of the U.S.-brokered Gaza ceasefire was an attempt to continue what it called a genocide against the Palestinian people.

In a televised statement, Hamas' armed wing spokesperson Abu Ubaida said raising the issue of weapons "in a crude manner" would not be accepted.

The issue of Hamas relinquishing its weapons is a major obstacle in talks to implement U.S. President Donald Trump's proposed "Board of Peace" plan for Gaza, aimed at cementing a ceasefire that halted two years of full-scale fighting last October.

Hamas has told mediators it will not discuss disarmament without guarantees that Israel will completely quit Gaza, three sources told Reuters last week.

"What the enemy is trying to push through today against the Palestinian resistance, via our brotherly mediators, is extremely dangerous," he said.

He said disarmament demands were "nothing but an overt attempt to continue the genocide against our people, something we will not accept under any circumstances."

It was not immediately clear whether the comments amounted to a formal rejection of the U.S.-backed disarmament plan, and Hamas political officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Hamas-Israel war in Gaza erupted after Hamas-led fighters carried out cross-border attacks on southern Israel, prompting a devastating Israeli offensive that displaced much of Gaza's population and left the enclave largely in ruins.

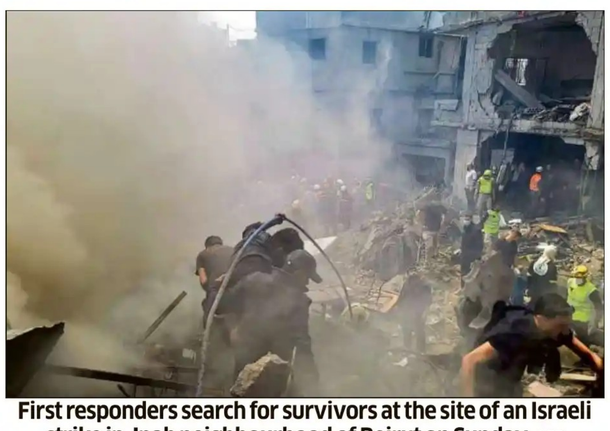
Since the ceasefire took effect, Hamas and Israel have repeatedly accused each other of violating its terms.

Abu Ubaida urged mediators to pressure Israel to fulfil its commitments under the first phase of the Trump plan before any discussion of the second phase can take place.

At least 11 killed in Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon on Easter Sunday

Country witnesses one of most violent days since start of war

REUTERS



First responders search for survivors at the site of an Israeli strike in Jnah neighbourhood of Beirut on Sunday. AFP

WAR RAGES ON

- Strike on Kfarhata followed an overnight evacuation order by the Israeli military.
- Throughout the day, Beirut echoed with the sounds of strikes and the screech of low-flying planes overhead.
- Lebanese army reports one soldier killed in Israeli strike.

An Israeli airstrike on Kfarhata, a village in south Lebanon, killed seven people on Sunday, including a 4-year-old child, Lebanon's health ministry said in a statement.

Another Israeli attack on the Jnah neighbourhood in Beirut killed four people and injured 39 others, the ministry added.

The strike on Kfarhata followed an overnight evacuation order by the Israeli military instructing residents to leave the village.

As Lebanese Christians, who make up roughly a third of the population, marked Easter Sunday, the country experienced one of its most violent days since fighting with Israel erupted early last month.

Throughout the day, Beirut echoed with the sounds of strikes and the screech of low-flying planes overhead. The southern suburbs of the capital were hit by eight airstrikes, state media reported.

Earlier on Sunday, the Lebanese army said a soldier had been killed in an Israeli strike in southern Lebanon.

On Saturday, the Israeli military issued an evacuation warning targeting Lebanon's Masnaa border crossing with Syria, the main entry point connecting the two countries, alleging it was being used by the Lebanese Hezbollah armed group for military purposes.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East conflict when Iranian-backed Hezbollah began to launch rockets at Israel on March 2 in support of Tehran.

Israel has launched strikes on Lebanon and invaded the south in what has become the most violent spillover of the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran.

By late March, more than 400 Hezbollah fighters had been killed, sources told Reuters. At least 10 Israeli troops have been killed in southern Lebanon in the same period, the Israeli military has said.

The Lebanese health ministry said 1,461 people had been killed in Israeli attacks in Lebanon as of Sunday, raising the death toll since the start of the war by 39 in around 24 hours. More than one million people have been displaced.

Israel said it intends to control a "security zone" as deep as 30 km (20 miles) into Lebanese territory. It has issued evacuation orders covering around 15% of Lebanese territory.

But tens of thousands of Lebanese have remained in their homes in the south, including around 9,000 Lebanese Christians living in a cluster of border towns.

France condemns China's execution of French citizen

PARIS, AP: France said China has executed a French citizen convicted of drug trafficking after keeping him on death row for over 15 years.

Chan Thao Phoumy, 62, was executed in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, despite French authorities' clemency appeals, the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement late Saturday. A Chinese court sentenced him to death in 2010.

The ministry's statement expressed "consternation" and added: "We particularly regret that Mr. Chan's defence did not have access to the final court hearing, which constitutes a violation of his rights."

PHOTOMETRIC OBSERVATIONS

Artemis astronauts to study Moon's surface using mainly their eyes

WASHINGTON, AFP

More than 50 years after humans first flew around the Moon, Artemis astronauts will repeat the feat on Monday and use the most basic instrument to study it: their eyes.

Despite the technological advancements since the Apollo missions, Nasa still relies on the eyesight of its astronauts to learn more about the Moon.

"The human eye is basically the best camera that could ever or will ever exist," Kelsey Young, the lead scientist for the Artemis 2 mission, told AFP.

"The number of receptors in the human eye far outweighs what a camera is able to do."

Although modern cameras may be superior to human eyesight in some respects, "the human eye is really good at color, and it's really good at context, and it's also really good at photometric observations," Young said. Humans can understand how lighting changes surface details, like how angled lighting reveals texture but reduces visible color.

In just the blink of an eye, humans can detect a subtle color shift and understand how lighting changes the contours of a landscape like the Moon's surface, details which are scientifically useful but difficult to ascertain from photos or videos.

Artemis 2 astronaut Victor Glover, who pilots the Orion spacecraft, said before liftoff this week that eyes were a "magical instrument." To ensure they made the most of their proximity to the Moon, the four Artemis 2 crew members underwent more than two years of training.

Young said the goal was to turn the astronauts into "field scientists" via a combination of classroom lessons, geological expeditions to Iceland and Canada, and multiple simulated flybys of the Moon, just like the mission they are on.

Russian missile designer Leonov who developed BrahMos dies

MOSCOW, PTI: A top Russian missile designer, Alexander Leonov, linked to the development of hypersonic missile Zircon and new generation Indo-Russian BrahMos NG, died at the age of 74 on Sunday, local media reported.

Leonov was CEO and Chief Designer of NPO Mashinostroyenia (NPOMASH), the Russian JV partner in New Delhi-based BrahMos Aerospace. His press service did not disclose the cause of his death or where he died immediately, according to the RBC news portal.

Leonov was credited for designing Russia's Zircon (Tsirkon) - a ship-based hypersonic cruise missile designed to destroy surface and land targets and is part of the 3K22 missile system, which entered service in January 2023.

The missile is launched from surface naval platforms and submarines and can be adopted for coastal defence.

Quoting open sources, RBC reported that Zircon is capable of reaching speeds of up to Mach 9 (9 times faster than sound) and has a range of 400 to 1,500 km.

Leonov, decorated with the Golden Star of Hero of Labour, oversaw design work on space systems and missile systems, participating in the development and adoption of the Granit, Vulcan, and Bastion coastal defence systems with the Onyx (BrahMos) missile, including for the Russian-Indian BrahMos JV and, as well as the work on advanced hypersonic vehicles, Russian news agencies said.

WORLD AT A GLANCE

Pope Leo XIV greets the crowd from St. Peter's Basilica balcony, offering Easter blessings to the city and the world at St. Peter's Square, Vatican, on Sunday. AFP

British PM slams London festival for booking Kanye West

Keir Starmer. Kanye West.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he was concerned about planned concerts in London by US rapper Kanye West, who has a history of antisemitic outbursts and released a song called "Heil Hitler", reports AFP from London.

The disgraced 48-year-old hip-hop star -- now known as Ye -- is due to play three nights at the Wireless festival in London in July as part of a European comeback tour.

Starmer told The Sun newspaper on Saturday it was "deeply concerning Kanye West has been booked to perform at Wireless despite his previous antisemitic remarks and celebration of Nazism". He added that "antisemitism in any form is abhorrent and must be confronted firmly".

Event sponsor Pepsi told The Independent news website on Sunday that it had withdrawn its sponsorship. Parent company PepsiCo did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

The planned appearances, announced by festival organisers on social media last month, had prompted criticism from Jewish organisations and London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

Congo-US deal on deportees

Congo will receive some migrants as part of a new deal under the Trump administration's third-country program, its government said Sunday, the latest such African nation to receive migrants being deported from the US, reports AP from Kinshasa.

The deportees will start arriving in Congo this month, the Congolese Ministry of Communications said in a statement, without further details on the date or the number of deportees expected.

It described the arrangement as a "temporary" one that reflects Congo's "commitment to human dignity and international solidarity." It would come with zero costs to the government with the US covering the needed logistics, it said.

The US has struck such third-country deportation deals with at least seven other African nations, many of them among countries hit the most by the Trump administration's policies that have restricted trade, aid and migration.

People protest in support of Khalistan outside the Triveni Mandir in Brampton, Ontario, on Sunday. AP/PTI

Nearly 800 TTP ultras killed: Pak

Pakistan on Sunday said nearly 800 Afghan Taliban terrorists have been killed in the ongoing operation launched by the security forces in Afghanistan, reports PTI from Islamabad.

Information Minister Attaullah Tarar shared the latest update on operation Ghazab lil-Haq , giving a summary of the losses suffered by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also called Fitna Al Khawarij (FAK) and Afghan Taliban.

Tarar said that at least 796 Fitna Al Khawarij and the Afghan Taliban personnel have been killed and more than 1,043 injured since the launch of the operation.

He added that 286 Afghan Taliban posts were destroyed and another 44 posts were captured while their 249 tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery guns and drones were destroyed.

Operation Ghazab lil-Haq was launched on the night of February 26, following what Pakistan called "unprovoked firing" by the Afghan Taliban from across the border.

Dozens of people are missing after a migrant boat capsized in the central Mediterranean, the NGOs Mediterranea Saving Humans and Sea-Watch said Sunday on social media. AFP

IN BRIEF

Ayaan crowned champion

Ayaan Jung carded rounds of 73, 72 for a two-day total of 145 to emerge victorious in the open category of the PG Gurjer Memorial Trophy played over the weekend at the Bangalore Golf Club, reports DHNS.

Ayaan, with a two-day total of 145, scored a six-shot win over Amitabh Poddar who totalled 151 after rounds of 73 and 78.

Results: Open category (gross): 145: Ayaan Jung (73, 72) 1; **151:** Amitabh Poddar (73, 78) 2.
Handicap (net): 0-9: 133: Pranav Rao (Pranav Rao 70, 63) 1; **142:** BK Prabhakara (72, 70) 2.
10-18: 134: Govind Srinivasan S (68, 66) 1; **135:** Amit Mandgi (67, 68) 2.
19-24: 135: Balasubramanian MS (67, 68) 1; **141:** GP Capt S Sreedhar (69, 72).
Ladies (gross): 155: Jayanthi Ravi (72, 83).
Handicap (net): 0-16: 139: Karishma Tandon (69, 70).
17-24: 138: Uma Mittal (70, 68).

Abhay wins, Anahat exits

India's Abhay Singh rallied to beat Egyptian world No. 13 Aly Abou Eleinen 3-2 in the men's singkles opening round of the El Gouna Open, a PSA Platinum event, in El Gouna, Egypt, reports PTI from New Delhi.

World no 25 Abhay eked out a 9-11, 11-8, 3-11, 11-4, 11-8 on Saturday. He will next meet Egyptian sixth seed and world no 7 Youssef Ibrahim.

Meanwhile, world No 20 Anahat Singh lost to world No 1 Hania El Hammamy, the Egyptian advancing with a 11-8, 11-5, 9-11, 11-8 first-round win in the women's singles.

India eye strong show with new faces, belief

BISHKEK, PTI: Buoyed by a mix of breakthrough performances and established consistency, India will head into the Asian Wrestling Championships, beginning here on Monday with quiet confidence, hoping its new crop of wrestlers can rise to the continental challenge.

The spotlight will firmly be on 53kg wrestler Meenakshi Goyat, who scripted one of the biggest upsets at the national trials by defeating two-time World Championships medallist Antim Panghal, while Aman Sehrawat (61kg) and Sujeet Kalkal (65kg) will be strong medal contenders in men's freestyle events.

The trials also showcased strength across weight divisions. In 50kg, Neelam impressed with her dominance, highlighted by a stunning suplex throw en route to her victories. Her ability to finish bouts emphatically makes her one to watch in Bishkek.

Among other categories, consistency prevailed. Mansi Ahlawat (62kg) and Manisha Bhanwala (57kg) secured their spots after controlled performances at the trials, with the latter's move down in weight further strengthening India's medal prospects.

The squad: Men's Freestyle: Ankush (57kg), Aman Sehrawat (61kg), Sujeet Kalkal (65kg), Abhimanyu (70kg), Jaideep (74kg), Sandeep Mann (79kg), Mukul Dahiya (86kg), Punit Kumar (92kg), Vicky (97kg), Dinesh Shankar (125kg).

Greco-Roman: Lalit (55kg), Sahil (60kg), Sunny (63kg), Sachin Sehrawat (67kg), Anil (72kg), Aman (77kg), Prince (82kg), Sunil Kumar (87kg), Nitesh (97kg), Joginder Rathi (130kg)..

Women: Neelam Sirohi (50kg), Meenakshi (53kg), Hanshika Lamba (55kg), Manisha Bhanwala (57kg), Neha Sangwan (59kg), Mansi Ahlawat (62kg), Monika (65kg), Mansi Lather (68kg), Harshitha (72kg), Kajal Dhocjak (76kg).

◆ ON TV ◆

CRICKET

IPL: KKR vs PBKS **(7:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Star Sports 1, JioHostar.**

FOOTBALL

La Liga: Girona FC vs Villareal **(12:30 am, Tueday)**. **LIVE** on **FanCode.**

IFL: Namdhari FC vs Diamond Harbour FC **(4 pm)**, Real Kashmir FC vs Chanmari FC **(6:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Ten 5.**

TENNIS

ATP Masters: Monte Carlo **(1:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on **FanCode.**

FOOTBALL

Arsenal exit after shock defeat

Stewart, Charles find targets in Southampton's 2-1 win

SOUTHAMPTON, AFP

Arsenal suffered a shock FA Cup quarterfinal exit as the Premier League leaders crashed to an embarrassing 2-1 defeat against second tier Southampton on Saturday.

Mikel Arteta's side were stunned by Shea Charles' late winner in a memorable quarterfinal giant-killing at St Mary's.

Ross Stewart put Southampton ahead in the first-half and Viktor Gyokeres' equaliser couldn't save Arsenal from only their fifth loss in all competitions this season.

After losing the League Cup final against Manchester City before the international break, the Gunners have squandered another chance to end their six-year trophy drought.

Arsenal are still firm favourites to win the Premier League for the first time since 2004 thanks to their nine-point lead over second-placed City.

That remains their primary target after three successive runners-up finishes in the top-flight, with the domestic cups lower down their list of priorities.

But Arteta will be concerned about Arsenal's sudden wobble, given their habit of choking away strong positions in the title race in recent years.

The withdrawals of 11 Arsenal players from international duty due to apparent injuries over the last two weeks had raised pointed questions about whether they had put the club ahead of their countries.

Arsenal's England stars Bukayo Saka and Declan Rice remained absent, while Arteta started with Gyokeres, William Saliba and Martin Zubimendi on the bench.

The north Londoners need to get back on track quickly, starting with their trip to Sporting Lisbon for the Champions League quarterfinal first-leg on Tuesday.

While Arsenal lick their wounds, Southampton celebrated one of the greatest results in their history.

Fifty years after their shock win over Manchester United in the FA Cup final, the Saints claimed another famous scalp as a second tier side.

Wearing yellow and blue commemorative kit to mark the anniversary of Bobby Stokes' Wembley winner against United in 1976, Southampton delivered the kind of vibrant display they struggled to produce during last season's relegation from the Premier League.

Southampton had already enjoyed a surprise win at Fulham in the fifth round in March, but dispatching Arsenal was a once in a lifetime upset.

They are into the FA Cup semifinals for the first time since 2021 when they lost to Leicester.

Results: Quarterfinals: Chelsea: 7 (Hato 2nd, Pedro 25th, Lawrence-Gabriel 43rd OG, Adarabioyo 57th, Santos 69th, Estevao 82nd, Garnacho 90th+2-pen) bt Port Vale: 0; Manchester City: 4 (Haaland 39th-pen, 45th+2, 57th, Semenyo 50th) bt Liverpool 0; Southampton: 2 (Stewart 35th, Charles 85th) bt Arsenal 1 (Gyokeres 68th).

Shea Charles celebrates scoring Southampton's second goal during their quarterfinal win over Arsenal at the St Mary's Stadium in Southampton on Saturday. REUTERS

Barcelona move 7 points clear at the top as Real stumble

BARCELONA, AFP: Robert Lewandowski shouldered home a dramatic late winner for Barcelona as they edged Atletico Madrid 2-1 on Saturday to move seven points clear at the top of La Liga after Real Madrid slipped up.

Second-placed Real were beaten 2-1 at Mallorca earlier on and Barca capitalised at the Metropolitano stadium to take a big step towards defending the league title.

Coach Hansi Flick said the race for the Spanish crown was not over but admitted it was an important victory.

Marcus Rashford pulled Barca level after Giuliano Simeone opened the scoring for the hosts in the first half.

Atletico midfielder Nico Gonzalez was sent off just before the break and his team dug deep with 10 men to try and avoid defeat, which they almost managed.

Robert Lewandowski celebrates after scoring a goal in Barcelona's 2-1 win over Atletico Madrid on Saturday. REUTERS

Veteran Polish striker Lewandowski had other ideas and used his shoulder to deflect home a rebound from point-blank range after 87 minutes.

"We all knew what happened in the afternoon," Barca defender Eric Garcia told DAZN.

"We knew that if we won today we would be taking a big step (towards the title), so we're very happy."

This was the first of a trilogy of matches between the sides, clashing in the Champions League quarterfinals over the next fortnight.

Result: Atletico Madrid: 1 (Simeone 39th) lt to Barcelona: 2 (Rashford 42nd, Lewandowski 87th).

Late birdie spree helps Kochhar finish T-5

CHIBA, PTI: Indian golfer Karandeep Kochhar logged his best finish at an international series event, hitting a late hat-trick of birdies in the thrilling fourth round to finish fifth, here Sunday.

Kochhar, who has twice finished runner-up in Asian Tour, carded a final round of 4-under 67 that featured birdies on his last three holes.

It was his second Top-5 in three Asian Tour starts this year.

The International Series events also count towards the Asian Tour, while the International Series has its own rankings, with the winner going to the Liv League.

It was Kochhar's third bogey free round in four days and it was only his third round of 73 that proved costly. Kochhar finished the week with a score of 12-under par (67-65-73-65).

Kochhar began the day with an early birdie on the fourth hole and was 1-under par at the turn. Kochhar closed his final round with three consecutive birdies to rise to T-5 alongside Hongtaek Kim of South Korea.

Jeev Milkha Singh was the only other Indian to have made the cut this week. The veteran finished T-70 after carding a final round of even par 71. He was 6-over par for the week (72-69-78-71).

Kochhar is now placed fifth on the Asian Tour Order of Merit.

Aditi in top-20

India's Aditi Ashok endured a disappointing four-over 76 in the third round to slip to T-20 with one round left to play at the Aramco Championship in Las Vegas.

Aditi (74-71-76) now has a total score of five-over par for the week.

The other Indians in the field Pranavi Urs (78) and Avani Prashanth (81) were struggling. Pranavi is now 13-over par, while Avani is 16-over par.

With one day left in the week, the two are placed T-69 and 73rd respectively.

Diksha Dagar missed the cut earlier in the week.

Vaishali beats Zhongyi to go 2nd; Praggnanandhaa plays another draw

Sindarov continues to be at the top of Open category

PAPHOS (CYPRUS), PTI

R Praggnanandhaa remained in search of his second win after drawing with pre-event favourite Fabiano Caruana, while his sister R Vaishali scored a fortunate victory over China's Tan Zhongyi in the seventh round of the Candidates tournament here.

The round largely followed a predictable pattern with multiple draws, reflecting the cautious approach adopted by players at the halfway mark.

At the half way stage, Pragg remains on a fifty per cent score and will need a strong run in the final seven games in order to come into contention. Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan was poised to make a draw with Anish Giri of Holland.

The Uzbek youngster had scored four victories in a row earlier in the event and continues to lead the standings comfortably. On what turned out to be another draw-heavy day, there was little movement in the leaderboard.

Sindarov, on six points, is firmly ahead of Caruana on 4.5, a full point ahead of Praggnanandhaa and likely Anish Giri. Matthias Bluebaum of Germany and Wei Yi of China are now on three points each, a half point ahead of Hikaru Nakamura of the United States, who has not been able to convert promising positions into full points.

Andrey Esipenko of Russia is languishing at the bottom with two points in his kitty and faces an uphill task in the remaining rounds.

In the women's section, Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine continued to lead the tables on 4.5 points following a draw with Bibisara Assaubayeva of Kazakhstan. R Vaishali stands on four points and is in second spot, while Bibisara is now in third place.

Divya Deshmukh enjoyed a handy advantage against Kateryna Lagno of Russia and will join Vaishali if she converts the position. In another game, Alexandra Goryachkina of Russia was also fighting it out against Jiner Zhu of China in a closely contested encounter.

R Vaishali is 0.5 point behind Ukraine's Anna Muzychuk (4.5), who drew against Kazakh Bibisara Assaubayeva in round 7 of the women's category of the Candidates tournament in Paphos, Cyprus on Sunday. PTI FILE PHOTO

Results: Round 7: Open: R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 3.5) drew with Fabiano Caruana (USA, 4.5); Andrey Esipenko (Rus, 2) lt to Wei Yi (CHN, 3); Matthias Bluebaum (Ger, 3) drew with Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 2.5).
Women: Bibisara Assuabayeva (Kaz, 3) drew with Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 4.5); R Vaishali (Ind, 4) bt Zhongyi Tan (CHN, 2.5).

Meenakshi, Jaismine move into semifinals

ULAANBAATAR (MONGOLIA), PTI: Indian women's boxing contingent continued its impressive run at the the Asian Boxing Championships as reigning world champions Meenakshi Hooda and Jaismine Lamboria stormed to the semifinals here on Sunday.

The pair's wins ensured the entire Indian women's contingent will finish on the podium.

In the men's section, triumphs for Lokesh, Akash, and Harsh Choudhary too made their way to the last-four stage.

Meenakshi produced a composed and commanding display to defeat Japan's Yuka Sadamatsu by a unanimous 5-0 decision, controlling the women's 48kg category bout with sharp combinations and ring awareness.

Jaismine matched that intensity in the 57kg division, outclassing China's Ziyi Chen with an equally dominant 5-0 verdict to book her place in the semifinals.

In the men's section, Lokesh (85kg) booked his place in the next round with a clinical 5-0 win over Korea's Gichae Kim, showcasing control and precision throughout the bout.

Jaismine Lamboria

Akash (75kg) followed with a dominant 5-0 victory against Turkmenistan's Yhlas Bagtyyarov, while Harsh Choudhary (90kg) delivered a strong performance to overcome Kyrgyz Republic's Tynystan Alybaev and move into the semifinals.

India now has six boxers in the men's semifinals. Ankush (80kg), however, bowed out after a loss to Jordan's Hussein Iashaish.

Certainty wins Kamareddy Plate

HYDERABAD RESULTS

Laxman Singh-trained Certainty, ridden by Kuldeep Singh, won the Kamareddy Plate, the feature event of the Hyderabad races on Sunday.

1. The Circar Plate - 1100M: Red Hot Punch (P Ajeet Kumar) 1; Divine Faith (Neeraj Rawal) 2; Ek (P Sai Kumar) 3; Aditya (Rafique) 4. WB: 5 1/4, 3/4, Nk. T: 1:07.35. TB: A Vatsalya; Fav: Aditya.
2. The Kinnerasani Plate (Div-I) - 1100M: Cosmic Gift (P Trevor) 1, Modin (P Ajeet Kumar) 2, Belgium Waffle (Mohit Singh) 3, She's Bomb (P Sai Kumar) 4. WB: 3 1/4, 1 1/4, 1/2. T: 1:06.87. TB: A Imran Khan; Fav Cosmic Gift.
3. The Kinnerasani Plate (Div-11) - 1100M: Quattro (A Asbar) 1, Rajendra (Kuldeep Singh) 2, Gacchanmanasvin (Md Ismail) 3, Speedy Queen (Surya Prakash) 4. WB: 4, Shd, Nk. T: 1:06.69. TB: RH Sequeira; Fav: Quattro.
4. The Rock Heaven Plate - 1400M: One Nation (Neeraj Rawal) 1, Feel The Magic (K Mukesh Kumar) 2, Real Thalaivaa (Mohit Singh) 3, Sadiya (Kuldeep Singh) 4. WB: 1 1/4, 5 1/2, Nk. T: 1:28.07. TB: RH Sequeira; Fav: Feel The Magic.
5. The Recommender Plate - 1400M: Shoolin (Dhanu Singh) 1, Foxy Girl (BR Kumar) 2, Armstrong (Md Ekram Alam) 3, Mystic Dawn (Kuldeep Singh) 4. WB: Nose, 4 1/2, 1/2. T: 1-26.42. TB: Magan Singh; Fav: Special Star.
6. The Kamareddy Plate - 1400M: Certanity 1, Arabeska (P Ajeet Kumar) 2, Exclusive Black (Md Ekram Alam) 3, Struss (Dhanu Singh) 4. WB: 2 3/4, 2 1/4, 2. T: 1-25.90. TB: Laxman Singh; Fav: Racing Ruler.
7. The Aristocrat Plate - 1200M: Trust Me (G Naresh) 1, Cosmic (K Mukesh Kumar) 2, Natu Natu Ajay Kumar) 3, Inderdhanush (Md Ekram Alam) 4. WB: 1/2, 1/2, 3/4. T: 1:14.93. TB: A Vatsalya ; Fav: Natu Natu.
8. The Kuntala Plate - 1400M: Photograph (G Naresh) 1, Bold Indian (K Mukesh Kumar) 2, Char Ek Char (Surya Prakash) 3, Hoping High (Mohit Singh) 4. WB: Nk, 2 3/4, 3/4. T: 1:29.84. TB: Robin Reddy; Fav: Bold Indian

Bengaluru Dividends
I race: Rs 49w; 11, 16, 16p; Shp: Rs 55; Thp: Rs 39; Fc: Rs 338; Q: Rs 157; Tri: Rs 628 & 168; Exp: Rs 4185 & 2242.
II race: Rs 15w; 11, 10, 18p; Shp: Rs 25; Thp: Rs 42; Fc: Rs 32; Q: Rs 29; Tri: Rs 134 & 62; Exp: Rs 283 & 90.
III race: Rs 16w; 10, 23, 19p; Shp: Rs 67; Thp: Rs 39; Fc: Rs 140; Q: Rs 128; Tri: Rs 990 & 376; Exp: Rs 4049 & 2920.
IV race: Rs 36w; 15, 10, 14p; Shp: Rs 34; Thp: Rs 46; Fc: Rs 77; Q: Rs 36; Tri: Rs 131 & 99; Exp: Rs 795 & 494.
V race: Rs 174w; 19, 19, 63p; Shp: Rs 48; Thp: Rs 162; Fc: Rs 2544; Q: Rs 1068; Tri: Rs C/F & 1797; Exp: Rs C/F & 19,348.
VI race: Rs 28w; 14, 20, 26p; Shp: Rs 33; Thp: Rs 62; Fc: Rs 103; Q: Rs 46; Tri: Rs 560 & 274; Exp: Rs 6091 & 4034.
VII race: Rs 148w; 25, 23, 16p; Shp: Rs 41; Thp Rs 61 ; Fc: Rs 1726; Q: Rs 390; Tri: Rs 7147 & 2382; Exp: Rs C/F.
VIII race: Rs 69w; 16, 14, 37p; Shp: Rs 31; Thp: Rs 89; Fc: Rs 167; Q: Rs 75; Tri: Rs 1697 & 2061; Exp: Rs 9486 & 3697.

Jackpot: Rs 5,66915 & 60,741. **I treble:** Rs 248. **II treble:** Rs 3093. **III treble:** Rs 6313.

Indian shooters look to extend dominance at World Cup

GRANADA, PTI: Indian pistol and rifle shooters will head into the season-opening ISSF World Cup, beginning here on Monday, with a firm resolve to extend the dominance they displayed last year -- when they set new benchmarks and excelled across virtually every competition they entered.

After a disappointing start to the season at the Shotgun World Cup in Morocco, where India endured a forgettable outing, the focus now shifts to the pistol and rifle events -- disciplines in which the country has traditionally excelled.

The team will be keen to compete with a renewed winning mindset, bolstered by the presence of some of the nation's finest shooters, including Olympians Rhythm Sangwan **(in pic)** and Anjum Moudgil, and Mehuli Ghosh.

However, the squad will miss the experience of double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker and world champion Samrat Rana, who are not part of the contingent.

Squad: Men: 10m Air rifle: Gajanan Khandagale, Arshdeep Singh, Dhanush Srikanth; **50m rifle 3-P:** Niraj Kumar, Akhil Sheoran, Chain Singh. **10m Air pistol:** Mukesh Nelavalli, Ujjawal Malik, Pramod. 25m rapidfire: Vijayveer Sidhu, Neeraj Kumar, Ankur Goel.
Women: 10m air rifle: Sonam Maskar, Shruti, Mehuli Ghosh; **50m rifle 3-P:** Ayushi Poddar, Anjum Moudgil, Surabhi Rapole; 10m air pistol: Palak, Sainyam, Meenu Pathak. 25m pistol: Rhythm Sangwan, Simranpreet Kaur Brar, Divya TS.
Mixed team: Air rifle: Gajanan Khandagale/Sonam Maskar; Arshdeep Singh/Shruti. Air pistol: Mukesh Nelavalli/Palak; Ujjawal Malik/Sainyam.

Australia hand India a drubbing

PATHUM THANI (THAILAND), PTI: India suffered a crushing 0-5 defeat at the hands of Australia in the AFC U20 Women's Asian Cup 2026 at the Pathum Thani Stadium here on Sunday.

Skye Halmarick's (38th, 39th, 48th) hat-trick put Australia in a commanding position, before Danella Brutus (54th) and Daisy Brown (90th+4) added two more for Australia. With this result, India currently sit at the bottom of Group C with zero points from their two games.

A win in their last group-stage match against Chinese Taipei on Wednesday can still secure passage to the knockout stage.

While the final score may reflect otherwise, the Young Tigresses began on a positive note in the early exchanges.

Pegula to face Yuliia in final

MIAMI, AFP

Defending champion Jessica Pegula advanced to the final of the WTA Charleston Open clay-court tournament on Saturday, defeating fourth seed Iva Jovic 6-4, 5-7, 6-3.

American top seed Pegula, who has been taken to three sets in each of her four matches in Charleston this week, finally wrapped up victory in 2hr 35min when Jovic pulled a forehand return wide.

The 32-year-old from New York will face Yuliia Starodubtseva in Sunday's final after the unseeded Ukrainian upset fifth seed Madison Keys in the other semifinal.

World No. 89 Starodubtseva, who was initially scheduled to go through qualifying in Charleston before being granted a place in the main draw after a withdrawal, defeated Keys 6-1, 6-4.

Yuliia Starodubtseva beat Madison Keys at the Charleston Open semis. AFP

World No. 5 Pegula will be chasing her second title of the season on Sunday after her victory in Dubai in February.

The American admitted after Saturday's latest three-setter that she has become used to taking the scenic route as she has advanced through the rounds in Charleston.

While Pegula will be targeting her second title of the year on Sunday, Starodubtseva will be aiming for the first of her career.

The 26-year-old Ukrainian punished Keys's fragile service game to race through the first set in just 31 minutes, breaking the American four times to win 6-1, before clinching victory with another service break in the 10th game of the second set.

Paul topples Tiafoe

Fourth-seeded Tommy Paul out-lasted second-seeded Frances Tiafoe 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) on Saturday to book a title clash with Roman Burruchaga at the ATP clay court tournament in Houston, Texas.

Paul improved to 4-1 against fellow American Tiafoe, denying the 2023 champion a fourth straight appearance in the Houston final.

10 TEAMS 13 VENUES 58 DAYS 74 MATCHES

"I am not a machine. My season can go up and down. I have performed well in the last few years. People have not noticed, that's different. But I always try to do well.

MD SHAMI, LSG PACER

B'luru six storm sinks Chennai

David turns Goliath as hosts post 43-run victory

VIGNESH BHARADWAJ
BENGALURU, DHNS

We will be reminded time and time again through social media how the Indian Premier League is the breeding ground for six-hitting talent.

On Sunday night, it was no different at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here with 30 sixes smashed. Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Tim David and Rajat Patidar handed proper evidence of the havoc the hosts could conjure, en route to a convincing 43-run win against arch-rivals Chennai Super Kings.

Once RCB posted a mammoth 250 for three — on the back of David's (70 not out, 25b) blitzkrieg — Devdutt Padikkal's calm demeanour with a 29-ball 50 and Patidar's 19-ball onslaught to 48 n.o., further complemented by CSK's batting woes, it felt like only the margin of victory was to be known.

RCB bowlers — namely Jacob Duffy (2/58), Bhuvneshwar Kumar (3/41), Abhinandan Singh (2/30) and Krunal Pandya (2/36) — then contributed to the visitors' meltdown as they were bowled out for 207 in 19.4 overs in exactly 100 minutes.

CSK's bumper signing Sanju Samson (9) endured his third consecutive failure while Ruturaj Gaikwad's (7) poor start to the tournament continued as Duffy picked both openers. Bhuvneshwar then became the first quick to pick 200 IPL wickets, sending Ayush Mhatre (1) back to the hut.

At 30/3 in 2.5 overs, it was a case of limiting the damage for the visitors but Sarfaraz Khan had other plans, kickstarting an onslaught with a 25-ball 50, smashing eight fours and two sixes.

However, there was no life in CSK's chase once Sarfaraz went back with wickets falling at regular intervals.

A game that seemed to start with some promise for the Super Kings finished as a drubbing that leaves them struggling at the bottom of the table.

Earlier, David, Patidar and Padikkal appeared to be batting on a different surface as they mastered a tacky first innings strip to guide the Challengers to a massive total.

David treated the CSK bowlers with utter disdain and made a mockery of the conditions in his short yet effective stay.

On the other hand, Padikkal saw through a tough phase, gained rhythm and never lost it. Patidar also joined the six-hitting party with an unbeaten 19-ball 48.

After RCB were asked to bat, Virat Kohli (28) began with a poke to point, calling for a single and could have been curtains had it been a direct hit. His partner Phil Salt (46) made his intentions clear with his approach but kept finding the fielders off good shots.

Kohli breathed another sigh of relief when Shivam Dube (1/30) handed him a golden opportunity by dropping him on seven off Khaleel Ahmed (0/37) in the third over.

RCB then got the impetus when Matt Henry (0/36) erred with line and lengths to give away 16 runs in the fourth over. Kohli began with a wristy no-look six over wide long-on and followed it up with a gorgeous straight drive back past the bowler.

Kohli continued in his audacious way with a boundary over mid-wicket in the next over off Anshul Kamboj (1/52). However, his respite was short-lived, making the long walk back on 28, handing Dube a redemption at mid-wicket.

After Salt's dismissal, Patidar joined Padikkal as the duo stitched a 50-run partnership off just 15 balls. The Karnataka southpaw soon reached his 13th IPL fifty and second of the season in 28 balls.

The Padikkal show finally came to an end when he tried to be a little cheeky but Jamie Overton's yorker sent his leg stump for a stroll.

David made an absolute mockery of Overton's third over, smashing him for three consecutive sixes as the Super Kings' death-bowling woes was once again exposed, leaking 97 runs in the final five overs.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Tim David smashed an unbeaten 25-ball 70, laced with three fours and eight towering sixes, to take his side to 250/3 against Chennai Super Kings in Bengaluru on Sunday. DH PHOTO/ B K JANARDHAN

SCOREBOARD

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BENGALURU: Phil Salt c Noor b Dube 46 (30b, 3x4, 2x6), Virat Kohli c Dube b Kamboj 28 (18b, 2x4, 1x6), Devdutt Padikkal b Overton 50 (29b, 5x4, 2x6), Rajat Patidar (not out) 48 (19b, 1x4, 6x6), Tim David (not out) 70 (25b, 3x4, 8x6) Extras (B-1, LB-3, NB-1, W-3) 8. **TOTAL (for 3 wkts, 20 overs) 250.**

Fall of wickets: 1-37 (Kohli), 2-93 (Salt), 3-151 (Padikkal).

Bowling: Khaleel Ahmed 4-0-37-0, Matt Henry 3-0-36-0, Anshul Kamboj 4-0-52-1, Noor Ahmed 4-0-49-0, Jamie Overton 3-0-42-1, Shivam Dube 2-0-30-1

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS: Sanju Samson c Padikkal b Duffy 9 (5b, 1x6), Ruturaj Gaikwad c Padikkal b Duffy 7 (3b, 1x6), Ayush Mhatre c Patidar b Bhuvneshwar 1 (3b), Sarfaraz Khan st Jitesh b Krunal 50 (25b, 8x4, 2x6), Karthik Sharma c Abhinandan b Pandya 6 (3b), Prashant Veer c Patidar b Bhuvneshwar 43 (29b, 6x4, 1x6), Jamie Overton c Bethell b Suyash 37 (16b, 4x4, 2x6), Anshul Kamboj (not out) 19 (12b), Noor Ahmad c Kohli b Bhuvneshwar 8 (8b), Matt Henry c Salt b Abhinandar 2 (3b). Extras (LB-2, NB-2, W-3) 7. **TOTAL (all out, 19.4 overs) 207.**

Fall of wickets: 1-9 (Ruturaj), 2-10 (Mhatre), 3-30 (Samson), 4-77 (Sarfaraz), 5-84 (Karthik), 6-108 (Dube), 7-165 (Veer), 8-178 (Overton), 9-190 (Noor).

Bowling: Jacob Duffy 4-0-58-0, Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-0-41-3, Abhinandan Singh 3.4-0-30-2, Krunal Pandya 3-0-36-2, Suyash Sharma 4-0-21-1, Romario Shepherd 1-0-19-0.

Result: RCB won by 43 runs.

PoM: Tim David.

Shami sizzles as LSG open account

HYDERABAD, PTI

Mohammed Shami asked probing questions not only to Sunrisers Hyderabad batters but also to the national selection committee with an opening spell for ages while skipper Rishabh Pant upped his game when it mattered to headline Lucknow Super Giants' thrilling five-wicket victory in an IPL match on Sunday.

Shami bowled an astounding 18 dot balls to finish with 2 for 9 in four overs which largely became responsible for SRH being restricted to 156 for 9. LSG rode on Aiden Markram's 27-ball-45 and skipper Rishabh Pant's 50-ball-68 not out to surpass the target with a ball to spare.

The chase got a touch tricky towards the end with 9 needed off the final over but Pant smote Jaydev Unadkat for two straight boundaries of the first two balls before another lofted boundary over mid-off to finish the game in style.

It was an innings that had nine boundaries and his choice of strokes was measured on a slowish track where SRH spinners Harsh Dubey and Shvang Kumar made the ball talk.

But it was Shami, the 35-year-old artist, who set up the match in the LSG's bowling Powerplay itself. His scalps were the crack opening pair of Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head, dismissed off successive deliveries across two overs with different variation of slower deliveries.

SCORE BOARD

SRH: Head c Markram b Shami 7, Abhishek c Siddharth b Shami 0, Kishan b Prince 1, Livingstone c Pant b Rathi 14, Klaasen c Pant b Avesh 62, Nitish c Prince b Siddharth 56, Aniket (not out) 2, H Dubey b Avesh 0, Shivang b Prince 5, Harshal (run out) 4. Extras (B-1, LB-1, W-3) 5. **TOTAL (for 9 wkts, 20 overs) 156.**

Fall of wickets: 1-1, 8-2, 11-3, 26-4, 142-5, 144-6, 144-7, 151-8, 156-9.

Bowling: Shami 4-0-9-2, Rathi 4-0-46-1, Yadav 4-0-34-2, Siddharth 4-0-29-1, Avesh 4-0-36-2.

LSG: Markram c Livingstone b Shivang 45, Mitchell c Nitish Reddy b Eshan 14, Pant (not out) 68, Badoni st Kishan b H Dubey 12, Pooran (run out) 1, Samad c Livingstone b H Dubey 16, Choudhary (not out) 2. Extras (B-1, LB-1) 2. **TOTAL (for 5 wkts, 19.5 overs) 160.**

Fall of wickets: 37-1, 77-2, 102-3, 105-4, 139-5.

Bowling: H Dubey 4-0-18-2, Nitish 1-0-14-0, Unadkat 3.5-0-50-0, Eshan 4-0-30-1, Harshal 3-0-16-0, Shivang 4-0-30-1.

Result: LSG won by 5 wkts.

PoM: Mohammed Shami.

Mohammed Shami (third from right) returned an impressive spell of 2/9 in four overs to set up LSG's five-wicket win over SRH on Sunday. REUTERS

Bold calls, GT win will boost Parag's confidence as leader: Pathan

AHMEDABAD, PTI: Former India pacer Irfan Pathan reckons the bold decisions taken by Riyan Parag at the death in Rajasthan Royals' thrilling win over Gujarat Titans will significantly boost his confidence as a leader.

Parag, who took over RR's captaincy this season, made a key tactical call in the final moments, handing Jofra Archer the 19th over while entrusting Tushar Deshpande with the last one.

"This was the best game of the season so far. It was very important for Rajasthan that Riyan Parag commands that respect while leading the side," Pathan said on JioStar.

"He made that difficult call in the last over, and that decision went in favour of Rajasthan, which will give him a lot of confidence as a leader. He went to Jofra Archer to bowl that 19th over, and generally, you go with your more experienced bowler in the penultimate over."

Archer justified the move with a superb over, conceding just four runs and applying the brakes on Gujarat's chase.

KSCA officially unveils Dravid, Kumble Stands at Chinnaswamy

VIGNESH BHARADWAJ
BENGALURU, DHNS

The Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) on Sunday officially unveiled the two ends at the iconic M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru after former India captains Rahul Dravid and Anil Kumble during Royal Challengers Bengaluru's game against arch-rivals Chennai Super Kings.

The old BEML end was renamed after Dravid while the pavilion end was honoured after Kumble.

The ceremony was attended by KSCA president Venkatesh Prasad and vice-president Sujith Somasundar, along with secretary Santosh Menon and other association members.

Both of Dravid and Kumble's families were also in attendance for the special occasion.

The KSCA in February had announced that Dravid, Kumble and former India cricketer Shantha Rangaswamy will have stands/ends honoured after them.

"It's been a second home to me. It's been a place where we've probably spent more time than we have in our houses. But it's also a place that has truly given me everything I am today. I can never be grateful enough for what the KSCA and this great, iconic ground have given me in my life," Dravid had earlier said.

Meanwhile Kumble also shared the attachment he has with the venue since his childhood days.

"Coming here to watch a match as a nine-year-old and then to see my name on top of a pavilion is very special," he had said.

Kumble is India's highest wicket-taker in Tests and ODIs with 619 and 337 wickets respectively while Dravid (13,288) is the second-highest run-scorer in Tests for the country.

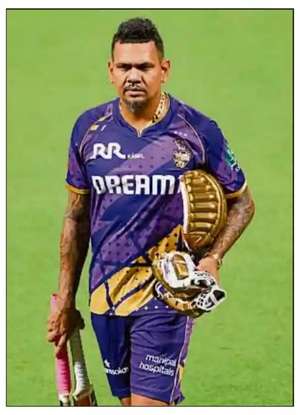
Former India captains Anil Kumble (left) and Rahul Dravid (right) with KSCA president Venkatesh Prasad (second from right) and secretary Santosh Menon during an event where the two bowling ends at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium were officially named after Kumble and Dravid on Sunday. PTI

KKR seek turnaround vs PBKS

KOLKATA, PTI

A beleaguered and increasingly rudderless Kolkata Knight Riders will need a strong turnaround to halt their poor start when they face an in-form Punjab Kings in their IPL clash here on Monday.

The three-time champions may point to the absence of frontline pacers Mustafizur Rahman, Harshit Rana, Akash Deep and Matheesha Pathirana for their early struggles, but the larger issue lies in a flawed team strategy that has left them staring at a third successive defeat.



KKR's Sunil Narine

POINTS TABLE

Team	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
RCB	2	2	0	0	4	2.501
RR	2	2	0	0	4	2.233
DC	2	2	0	0	4	1.170
PBKS	2	2	0	0	4	0.637
SRH	3	1	2	0	2	0.275
MI	2	1	1	0	2	-0.206
LSG	2	1	1	0	2	-0.542
GT	2	0	2	0	0	-0.424
KKR	2	0	2	0	0	-1.964
CSK	3	0	3	0	0	-2.517

LIVE @ 7:30 PM

The decision not to retain Shreyas Iyer, who led them to the 2024 title, raised eyebrows, and it has only looked worse in hindsight. Iyer went on to vindicate himself by leading Punjab Kings to a runners-up finish in 2025, becoming the first captain to guide three different franchises -- Delhi Capitals (2020), KKR (champions 2024) and PBKS (2025) -- to the finals.

In contrast, KKR endured a forgettable campaign last season, finishing eighth for the first time since 2009.

Ajinkya Rahane, brought in as captain despite being out of favour in the T20 scheme of things, did silence critics to an extent by emerging as their leading run-getter. But the team's thinking including the elevation of Abhishek Nayar as head coach in place of Chandrakant Pandit, has come under scrutiny.

Nayar was incidentally the coach of UP Warriorz in this year's WPL in their bottom-placed finish.

The muddled strategy is most evident in their team combination. Despite having three top New Zealand players -- Finn Allen, Tim Seifert and Rachin Ravindra -- KKR have failed to utilise their resources effectively.

Allen has been the only one to get a look-in, while Seifert, the second-highest run-getter in the last T20 World Cup, and Ravindra, a proven spin-bowling all-rounder, continue to warm the bench.

Instead, KKR's persistence with Sunil Narine -- a franchise regular since 2012 -- despite his diminishing returns, has raised questions. The situation is further complicated by the inclusion of all-rounder Cameron Green, who has been restricted from bowling by Cricket Australia, leaving the side with two overseas players not fully contributing.

Add to that the presence of Rovman Powell, another proven T20 performer, on the sidelines, and KKR's selection calls appear increasingly baffling.

Even their high-profile support staff -- Shane Watson, Dwayne Bravo and Andre Russell -- has not been able to provide clarity, making one ponder who is actually calling the shots at KKR?

While their bowling was expected to be a concern, the batting has fared no better.

Rahane's move to promote himself to open has yielded mixed results, and the lineup looks thin beyond No. 5.

In their first home match, they were bowled out for 161 in just 16 overs while chasing 227 against Sunrisers Hyderabad on a freeflowing Eden.

The lower middle order, comprising Ramandeep Singh and Anukul Roy, lacks the firepower, while Narine has been pushed down to No. 8, reflecting the lack of a settled plan.

Gujarat Titans lost wickets in clusters after Sai Sudharsan's dismissal in defeat against Rajasthan Royals on Friday.

'Need to be more cohesive in chases'

AHMEDABAD, PTI

Gujarat Titans batting coach Matthew Hayden wants a more cohesive effort from his batters following the team's second loss in as many games in the Indian Premier League here.

Gujarat Titans, a team that over relies on its top-order, could not chase down 211 against Rajasthan Royals at home on Saturday night despite being at 107 for one in the 11th over.

The 78-run opening stand between Sai Sudharsan (73 off 44) and Kumar Kushagra (18 off 14) provided the hosts an ideal launchpad but a cluster of wickets in the middle saw them slip to 161 for seven.

"Washy Sundar, he had a pretty big decision to make at that point around if you're going to attack someone like Bishnoi, who was on a roll.

"That was maybe a choice that he can look at and will look at as well in terms of just trying to be a little bit more cohesive in our run chases, because it has to be said there wasn't a lot that went wrong in that first 12 overs," said Hayden in the post match interaction.

After Washington fell to Ravi Bishnoi, the run out of Shahrukh Khan also cost Gujarat Titans dearly. Hayden felt losing two wickets straightaway came back to haunt them in a match that saw them eventually fall short by a small margin.

"The run out (of Shahrukh Khan) was something that, again, was a decision which Shahrukh and Rashid had to make at the time.

"I haven't broken down that play because as a coach you tend to kind of look at the ball, but I'll be interested also to see the approach when we get back to vision of how that run was executed.

"It certainly looked at from the sideline that Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja, at the extra-cover boundary) bumped the ball quite a long way away from him and to regather, as we know, he's so quick and he's so good at getting and releasing the ball.

"But there's two wickets straightaway that would have been the difference. Again, we're talking about six runs. So those little things in T20 cricket, when you're chasing down a big total, which we were, they become vital in the decision-making process of a batting unit," added the Australian.

Searching for their first win of the season, Gujarat Titans take on undefeated Delhi Capitals in an away game on Wednesday.

It's going to be a tricky game for the former champions as Delhi Capitals are high on confidence following a noteworthy victory over five-time champions Mumbai Indians.

Green not far away from return to bowling, says Southee

KOLKATA, PTI

Kolkata Knight Riders' high-profile acquisition Cameron Green has resumed bowling in the nets and is "not far away" from doing so in an IPL match, bowling coach Tim Southee said on Sunday.

The Australian all-format all-rounder, IPL's costliest overseas buy at Rs 25.20 crore, has not bowled so far in the season as Cricket Australia monitors his workload post his back surgery.

"Yeah, Green's been bowling well, tracking his rehab and getting himself back to being able to bowl in games. He'll continue to do that," Southee said ahead of KKR's clash against Punjab Kings.

Cameron Green

However, it is unlikely that Green will bowl against PBKS on Monday, even though he was seen going full throttle at a practice session on Saturday.

Sunday's match-day minus one training was washed out at Eden Gardens, with most regulars staying away, while a few domestic recruits, including Angkrish Raghuvanshi and Rahul Tripathi, trained indoors.

KKR's inexperienced pace attack -- in the absence of Mustafizur Rahman, Harshit Rana, Akash Deep and Matheesha Pathirana for various reasons -- has been a major talking point early in the season.

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